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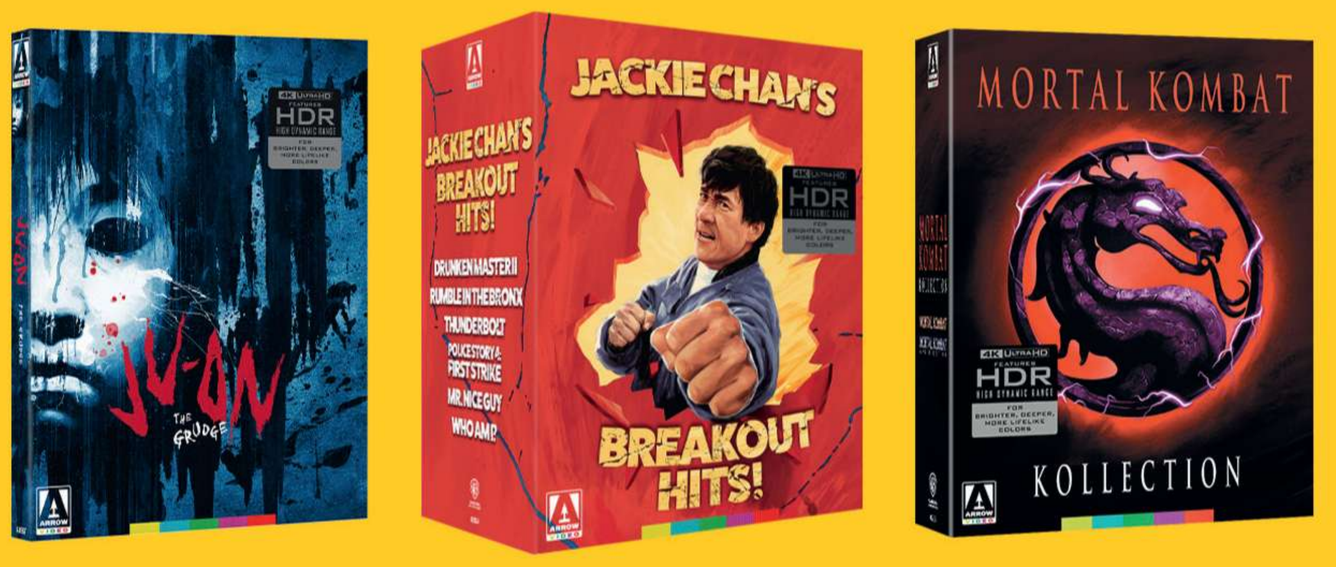

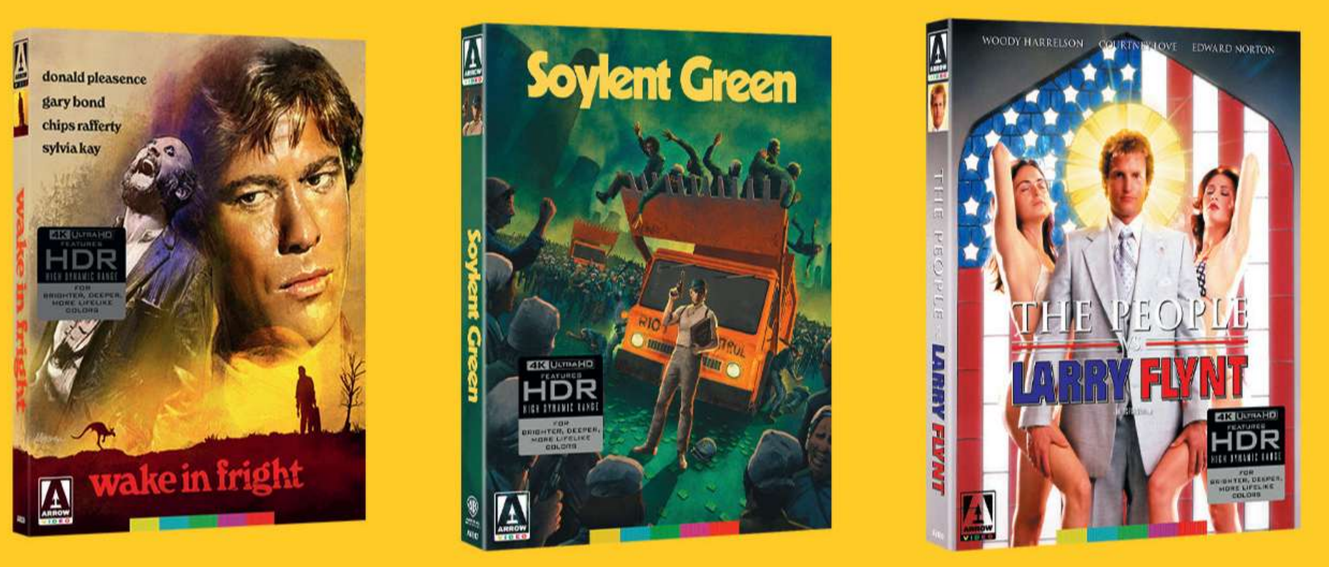

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INVOCATION

They Won't Stay Dead!

As I write this, I'm reading about how the box office success of *Backrooms* and *Obsession* have signaled the end of Hollywood as we know it. That's right: *Obsession* proved to the powers that be that you can make a good movie without leaning on creaky old franchises, and *Backrooms*, with its scrappy underdog viral origins, made more money than a *Star Wars* movie that same weekend, so of course this means the film industry is going to completely change forever.

Now, I love when folks are excited about a shiny new thing, and as I said recently, I even kind of like it when I don't share their enthusiasm. You go ahead and hype that movie you love! Positive energy is in short supply in the world, and I'll take people being stoked for something where I can. I hate when people say something is "overhyped." That's on you, not the hyped individual. Let the hype flow.

My only problem with the "everything will be different after this" crowd is that I've been watching Hollywood take the wrong lessons from horror successes for a few years now, and I don't have much faith that the machine (or those who run it) will suddenly see the light. You didn't need Curry Barker's *Obsession* to tell you that the MCU/*Star Wars*/Disney bubble was about to burst. Now that it has, I hope you don't think you're gonna see the studios greenlighting massive amounts of modestly budgeted, original horror films. The first thing they did with Barker was hand him the *Texas Chainsaw* franchise, for god's sake.

That's not to say he's not gonna do interesting things with that property, but my point is the industry — or the horror industry, at any rate — can't be trusted to do the smart thing here. But honestly, who cares? The win is staring us in the face: horror has always been a space for new filmmakers to flourish. It's a genre whose creators don't wait for permission, and that's frequently exciting enough. But when they're given support, as Barker and *Backrooms*' Kane Parsons were, everyone benefits.

And if those filmmakers then decide to pivot to IP… well, results vary, but let's not act like it's not business as usual, or that it can't be great when these upstarts are called up to the big leagues. Sébastien Vaníček going from his debut feature *Infested* to *Evil Dead Burn* (much as Lee Cronin did with *Evil Dead Rise*, and Francis Galluppi will in two years with *Evil Dead Wrath*) is a great example of how the genre not only platforms new voices, but levels them up without acting like we have to burn it all down. (Now they just need to do this with some women; as filmmaker/former Fango contributor Axelle Carolyn noted online, "Funnily, when *The Babadook* came out I don't remember any headlines yelling 'Quick! Give a bunch of 45-year-old women their first feature!'")

In the pages that follow you'll find plenty of new, original horror to dive into — but I'm not ready to call time of death on the old guard yet. The smart ones, like *Evil Dead* franchise producers Sam Raimi, Rob Tapert and Bruce Campbell, know how to work with the youths to keep horror — and the industry — alive and kicking.

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

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IT BELONGS IN A MUSEUM

Quick message from an Aussie fan (been collecting since I was 13; I'm now 52!!!!). Even though FANGORIA was not that easy to find in Sydney in the '80s, I made sure I tracked down every copy. Fango's championing artists (of all kinds) led me to the path of being an artist myself.

I just wanted to let you know that my return favour to you guys is this painted tribute and love letter to FANGORIA (attached). It's a large scale portrait of Aussie horror directors Michael and Danny Philippou (*Talk to Me*, *Bring Her Back*) told through the lens of FANGORIA. The painting is currently exhibited in Australia's most prestigious portrait prize, The Archibald Prize. Enjoy!

Also, great to see that Fango still supports artists. I bet lots of artists have woven Fango into their works over the years.

Cheers,
Drew Bickford
Sydney
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Holy hell, Drew, that painting is a beast. Thanks so much for sharing; let's talk! And yes, real artists, forever. - PN

READ FANGO, BABY

Look at this baby reading FANGORIA. This baby (Clara Josefina Dobosz) knows what's up. Do you have friends who don't read Fango? Do your friends realize they're dumber than a literal BABY?! Have a word with your friends, for god's sake.

A Concerned Fango Fam
Argentina

BLOODY BITES
by sHANE tEA fRENCH

"I think Tiffany would prefer this BiG OL' D?"

MONSTER INVASION

HER PRIVATE ELLE: SOPHIE THATCHER'S LATEST ROLE CONTINUES HER ARTY SCREAM QUEEN ASCENDENCY.

NICOLAS WINDING REFN COMES BACK FROM THE DEAD FOR HER PRIVATE HELL

By Isaac Feldberg

Nicolas Winding Refn describes *Her Private Hell* as a "creative resurrection" — and the Danish provocateur means that literally. Three years ago, the filmmaker behind *Only God Forgives* and the *Pusher* trilogy faced death amid a terrifying medical emergency.

Almost accidentally, Refn tells FANGORIA, a doctor discovered a leaking heart valve was causing blood to run backward through his heart and into his lungs. Two weeks later, he was on the operating table. The surgery proved so precarious he nearly didn't wake up. "I was dead for 25 minutes," Refn recalls, speaking at the Cannes Film Festival on the eve of his latest film's out-of-competition premiere. "It was not a near-death experience. It was a death experience."

The close call caused Refn — who hadn't made a theatrical feature since *The Neon Demon* a decade ago but had been active since in creating television for Amazon (macabre crime drama *Too Old to Die Young*) and Netflix (supernatural noir *Copenhagen Cowboy*) — to re-evaluate his priorities. "Before I died, I'd come to the end of my artistic journey," he says. "I'd done everything I wanted to do. There was nothing left inside of me. But dying is very interesting. When I died and was reborn, it was like I'd been given a gift — a second chance to come back. I suddenly felt I had a very specific purpose: to make films again."

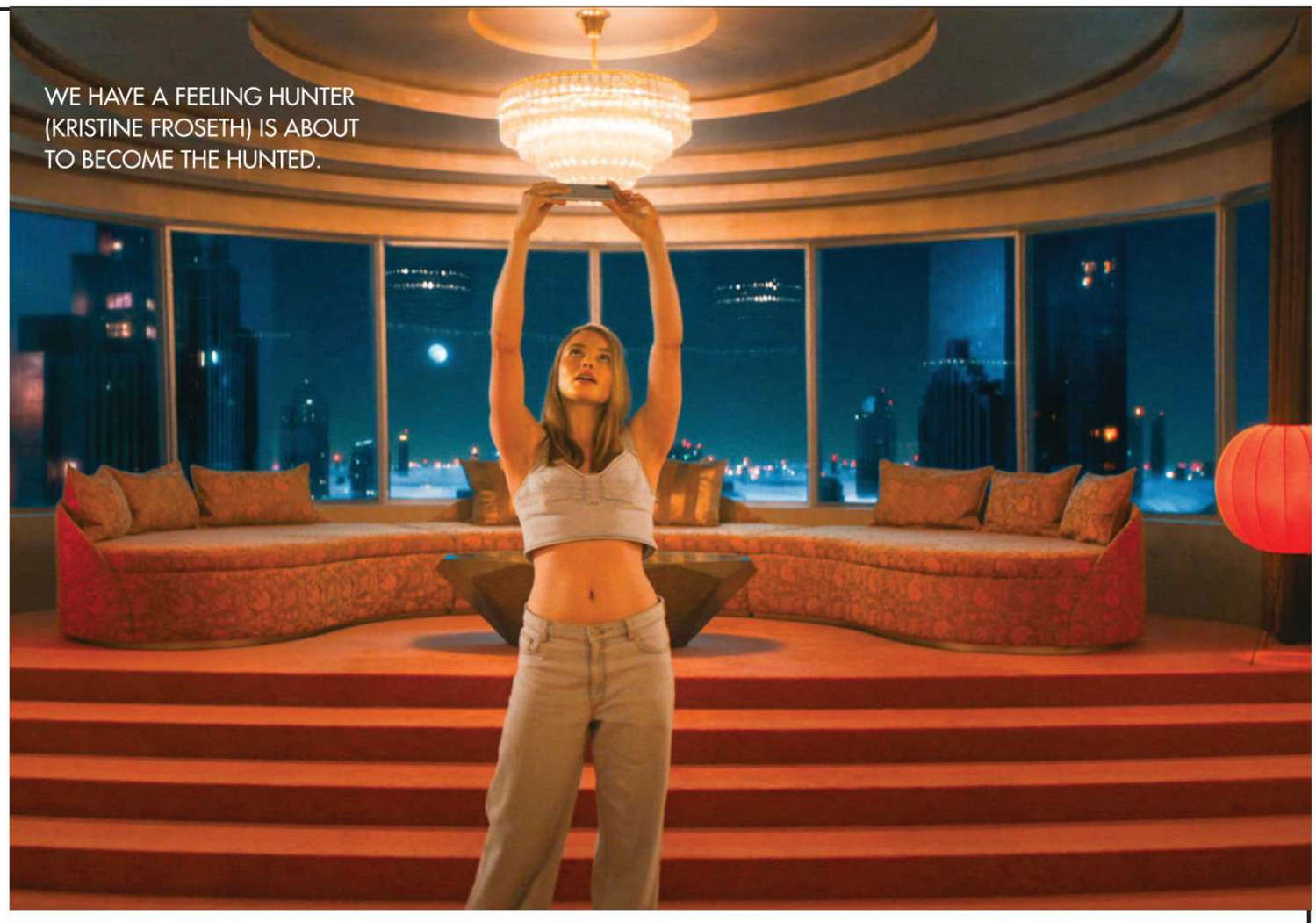
More specifically, Refn sought to craft a "collective experience" out of the dreamlike sensations he recalled from age eight of channel-surfing, late at night, through science-fiction and horror programming. "Cinema can only take you so far in what it tells you, but you can go further with what it inspires in you," he says. "I wanted to make something that was about inspiring internal narratives within the audience, taking them on their own personal odysseys."

The result, *Her Private Hell*, is classic Refn in its surrealistic, neon-streaked fugue of seduction and violence, with the connective tissue between its narrative strands remaining opaque until the film's third act brings them together in gory, melodramatic fashion.

Set in a mist-laden metropolis, one story follows Elle (Sophie Thatcher), a tortured actress confined to an opulently Stygian hotel suite. Preparing to film a space opera while locked in a psychosexual feud with the ex-friend (Havana Rose Liu) who married her father (Dougray Scott), Elle — alongside ingénue Hunter (Kristine Froseth) — becomes enthralled by the urban legend of the Leatherman, a demon with piercing red eyes who preys on lost daughters by ripping their chest cavities apart with diamond-encrusted gloves.

Elsewhere, Private K (Charles Melton) — an American GI determined to rescue his daughter from the bowels of hell — descends into a Tokyo-toned criminal underworld in search of this serial killer, brutalizing *yakuza* enforcers along Golden Gai alleyways as he gouges eyeballs, severs hands, and brandishes brass knuckles to pound opponents into pulp.

Both stories in this "horrific opera" — which NEON releases in US theaters this July — echoed Refn's health crisis. "I'd made peace with my wife of 30 years, and my eldest daughter was old enough to live her own life, but my youngest

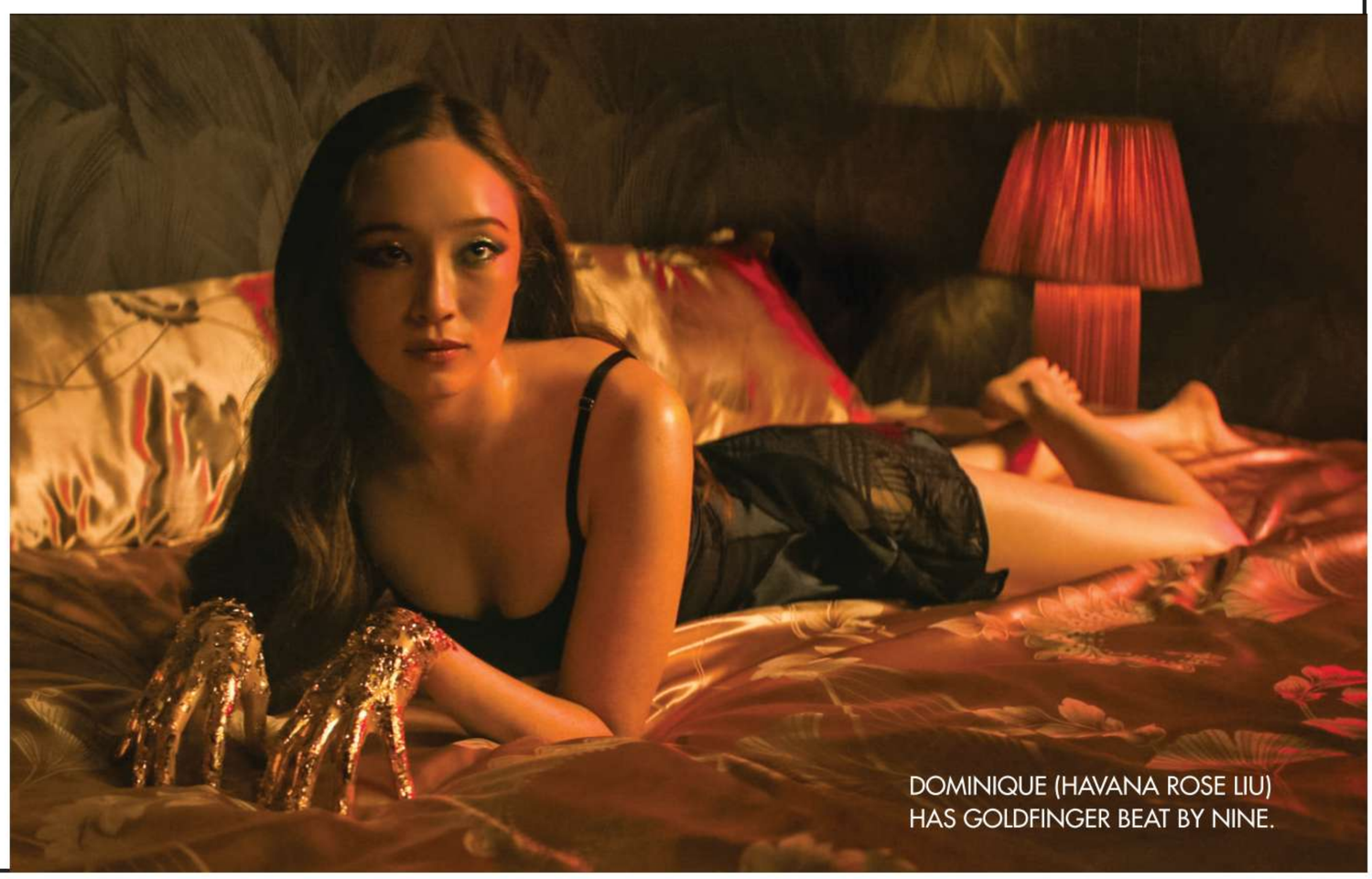


WE HAVE A FEELING HUNTER (KRISTINE FROSETH) IS ABOUT TO BECOME THE HUNTED.

wasn't ready for me to go," Refn explains. "I made a conscious decision, going into surgery, to come back for her. If I could, I knew my next film needed both stories — one of a young woman coming to a city she doesn't know, which could be seen as my eldest daughter leaving me, and one of a father who needs to bring his daughter back from hell, which I felt was related to my youngest."

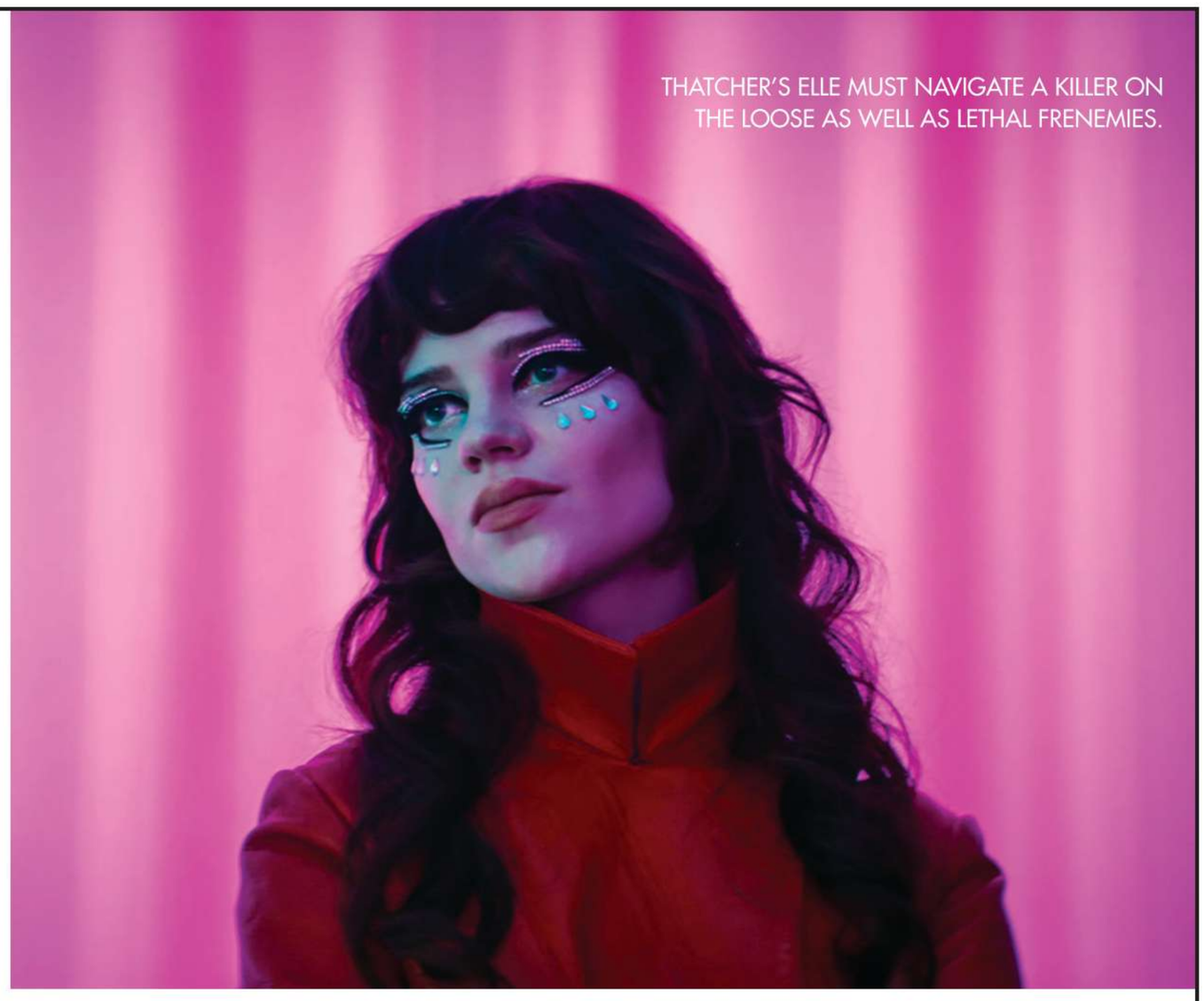
Refn's recent experience directing the giallo-infused "Touch of Crude" short for Prada — starring his wife and daughters, with a synth score by *Drive* composer Cliff Martinez — was inspirational along similarly subconscious lines. "I love the giallo's fetishization of objects; it is very much eroticism, Italian-style," Refn says. "It's always been very easy for me to bring giallo into my fantasies, because giallo has such larger-than-life grandeur. The stage is bigger, the stakes more extreme; using the color palette of something so extreme is very seductive."

Beyond *Her Private Hell*'s encroaching mist, what linked the narratives was Leatherman, a "glam-monster" concept Refn dreamed up years earlier. "This mythical creature represents the uncontrollable, animalistic desire to tear you open and see what's inside," he says. "With him, *Her Private Hell* became an opera; the triangle between all three concepts gave me a narrative scope."



DOMINIQUE (HAVANA ROSE LIU) HAS GOLDFINGER BEAT BY NINE.

PHOTOS COURTESY NEON



THATCHER'S ELLE MUST NAVIGATE A KILLER ON THE LOOSE AS WELL AS LETHAL FRENEMIES.

Refn spent another year developing the story with co-writer Esti Giordani before proceeding to casting. There, he relied on intuition; Refn recruited Melton after watching *Riverdale* with his youngest daughter, and he felt upon auditioning Thatcher that they shared artistic sensibilities. With those actors secured, the rest fell into place; filming took place with a 30-person crew over 57 days on Copenhagen soundstages.

On set, Refn set the tone with his actors by playing orchestral scores by the legendary Italian composer Pino Donaggio, from Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* to Brian De Palma's *Dressed to Kill* and Dario Argento's *Trauma*. Donaggio's influence was so immense Refn resolved — once reassured the composer was alive and working — to reach out personally.

"Music penetrates you emotionally in a different way than dialogue; I'd experiment with actors to move deeper inside their chests with Pino's scores, but he didn't become involved until after," Refn says. He met the composer in Milan and found Donaggio exceptionally eager. "He said he'd love to write an opera, that it would probably be one of his final scores," Refn recalls. "I told him to *go to town*."

Indeed, Donaggio's swooning, suspenseful score for *Her Private Hell* — full of otherworldly arias and dissonant, desirous thrums — is achingly emotional, more so than the ambient electronica Refn typically enlists, and emerges as his most expansive works, seeming to guide rather than accompany the fairytale-esque narrative through color-saturated sensation and gore-splattered gravitas.

"Pino is the last of a certain era of composers we objectify, as music and film aficionados; he was fucking dynamite," Refn says. "Working with this last maestro became an emotional part of my existence. I knew his music would be *Her Private Hell*'s secret weapon; though because it was an orchestral score, not an electronic score, I couldn't explain that to everyone until it was performed, recorded, mixed, and delivered. He really tied a bow around the entire film. "

Refn's next feature, which he'll soon shoot in Los Angeles, is his long-gestating remake of *Maniac Cop*, a cult '80s slasher about an undead cop who murders those who seek assistance. Unusually tight-lipped — yet visibly giddy — about the project, which he first circled as a producer a decade ago, Refn teases that his *Maniac Cop* will be "a radical new vision where there is no protection, no safety net: only mayhem."

For now, Refn's content to savor *Her Private Hell*, which he finished a week before its Cannes premiere, but he's eager to soon return to set. "When you're told you're going to die, you go through stages of anger, fear, and grief," he reflects. "But I knew, if I could survive, I could come back stronger. Now, I'm like a child again, in an adult body. I've been given my life back. Time is of the essence. People forget how fast it all evaporates — but I know what I'm here to do."

THE CAST OF *HER PRIVATE HELL* MIGHT JUST BE THE MOST GLAM SLASHER FODDER THE SCREEN HAS EVER SEEN.

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ELEGIES

MY "FLY" PAPERS

It was the assignment that almost every '80s-era STARLOG and FANGORIA writer would kill for: a set visit to David Cronenberg's 1986 remake of *The Fly*, celebrating its 40th anniversary this August. A wee lad of 22 and just getting my feet wet as Fango's managing editor, I unexpectedly won the gig even though I never campaigned for it! It ultimately became one of my favorite journalistic experiences.

"What was unusual about Cronenberg's *The Fly* was the higher level of interest," recalls David McDonnell, Fango's then-editor and my mentor. "At least a half-dozen of my writers, from the US and Canada, told me, weeks before cameras rolled, that they would like to be my *Fly* guy. Mainly due to love for the original 1958 movie and/or for Cronenberg's work. There was a sort of feeding frenzy for *The Fly*!"

At the time, Dave was serving as STARLOG's editor and a simultaneous role as Fango's interim editor (issues #50-62). "My FANGORIA mission was to make the magazine more visual and to train my pal, Tony Timpone, to take over as editor at my stint's end," Dave says. "In the meantime, I wanted him to accumulate as much experience as possible. And I thought of an 'elegant solution.' It combined location (NYC), expertise as a Cronenberg fan and availability (he was close at hand). Plus, I wanted to give Tony valuable on-set experience. Additionally, staffers were normally *not* paid any extra for articles they wrote, so I could save on my editorial budget. And, finally, I realized that awarding the job to an *editor* would downplay any resentment that might otherwise arise from dispatching one freelancer instead of another."

So, for three days in February 1986, I got to be a fly on the wall while Cronenberg's much-anticipated film lensed at Toronto International Studios in rural Kleinburg, Canada.

TWO STAGES OF BRUNDLEFLY'S TRANSFORMATION; ONE WITH JEFF GOLDBLUM AS THE DRIVING FORCE (ABOVE), AND ONE THAT'S PURE CHRIS WALAS.

The Brooksfilms/20th Century Fox production had scheduled its complex climactic metamorphosis FX blowout for the last few weeks of shooting… and some of it unfolded before my eyes. Nowadays, most studio set visits are junkets jointly attended by posses of print and online journalists, everyone herded like cattle for brief observations and tightly-controlled talent interviews.

On *The Fly*, I had largely unlimited access to cast and crew, starting with Cronenberg. Unit publicist Prudence Emery, the *grande dame* of Canadian press agents, made a point of introducing me to Cronenberg first upon my arrival to the laboratory set. He got a little nervous when he saw my stack of questions, but for the next three days, every time there was a short break in the action while Chris Walas' FX boys set up their complicated *Fly* puppets, the director ushered me into his office so we could knock off my questions little by little.

I got off on the wrong foot with the filmmaker. Before my trip, I had read *Psycho III* screenwriter Charles Edward Pogue's early draft of *The Fly*. Unbeknownst to me, Cronenberg had junked most of Pogue's work and completed an extensive rewrite. So, every time I asked about the abandoned draft, Cronenberg had to bring me up to speed. He took pleasure in explaining that his version emphasized the characters, relationships and romance, and how he retained Pogue's gross-out stuff without having to add his customary "more blood!"

In short order, I filled up cassette tape after cassette tape with the *Fly* folks: FX artists Chris Walas and Stephan DuPuis; producer Stuart Cornfeld; veteran DC DP Mark

GOLDBLUM AND DIRECTOR DAVID CRONENBERG MAKING CINEMA HISTORY IN 1986.

Irwin; computer and video FX supervisor Lee Wilson; and cast members Geena Davis and John Getz. What, no Jeff Goldblum? Well, the star's idiot publicity reps had advised him not to talk to any "sci-fi magazines." (Nine years later, Goldblum got over his shyness and chatted with Fango for 1995's *Hideaway*.) Funny enough, the summer before, I had met Goldblum and his then-squeeze Davis at the NYC premiere of their comedy *Transylvania 6-5000*. That film's director, Rudy De Luca, suggested Goldblum to his pal, *Fly* executive producer Mel Brooks, during casting; next, Goldblum pitched his real girlfriend to play his movie girlfriend! The closest I got to Goldblum on *The Fly* was when he popped into Davis' dressing room to say "hi" and to make sure I was behaving myself with the leggy actress. (Years later, Brooks told me that the studio wanted Pierce Brosnan, then hot from TV's *Remington Steele* and considered more bankable, to play the lead. Brosnan, to his ultimate regret, turned it down.)

Back on the set, I watched some of *The Fly*'s gnarliest action take place, including Brundlefly feeding on a severed foot and a scene in which the mutating scientist puts a cat and baboon into a telepod together in an effort to find a cure. Cronenberg eventually told me he cut that bit because it reeked of animal cruelty.

In all, I filed nine (!) all-different articles on *The Fly*: *six* for Fango and two for STARLOG, plus a separate piece for *Video Review* when the movie hit VHS. Ace genre publicist Terry Erdmann buried us with the most amazing pics from the shoot, including shots of the final monster that made it on the covers of both Fango (#58's stunner) and STARLOG (#110) while the movie was in theaters. Our publisher certainly got his money's worth, and I forged unforgettable memories.

On the occasion of *The Fly*'s 25th anniversary, Brooks reached out to me. In 1986, the funnyman kept his association with *The Fly* unpublicized, as he didn't want to give audiences the wrong impression. During our 2011 call, Brooks loved reminiscing about hiring Cronenberg, their updated approach to the 1958 sci-fi chestnut, and his misgivings over *The Fly II*. Brooks also said the key to *The Fly*'s success was the concept of metamorphosis, which had also drawn Cronenberg to the project.

"That was the secret," Brooks recalled. "That was the trick. That was the genius of it. [Brundle] would slowly, but surely, become a fly. It started with maybe fingernails going away and then you're taking off an ear and there are fly hairs on his back. It was just gruesome, terrible, scary and brilliant."

THE LEGENDARY MONKEY-CAT, EXCISED FROM THE FINISHED FILM.

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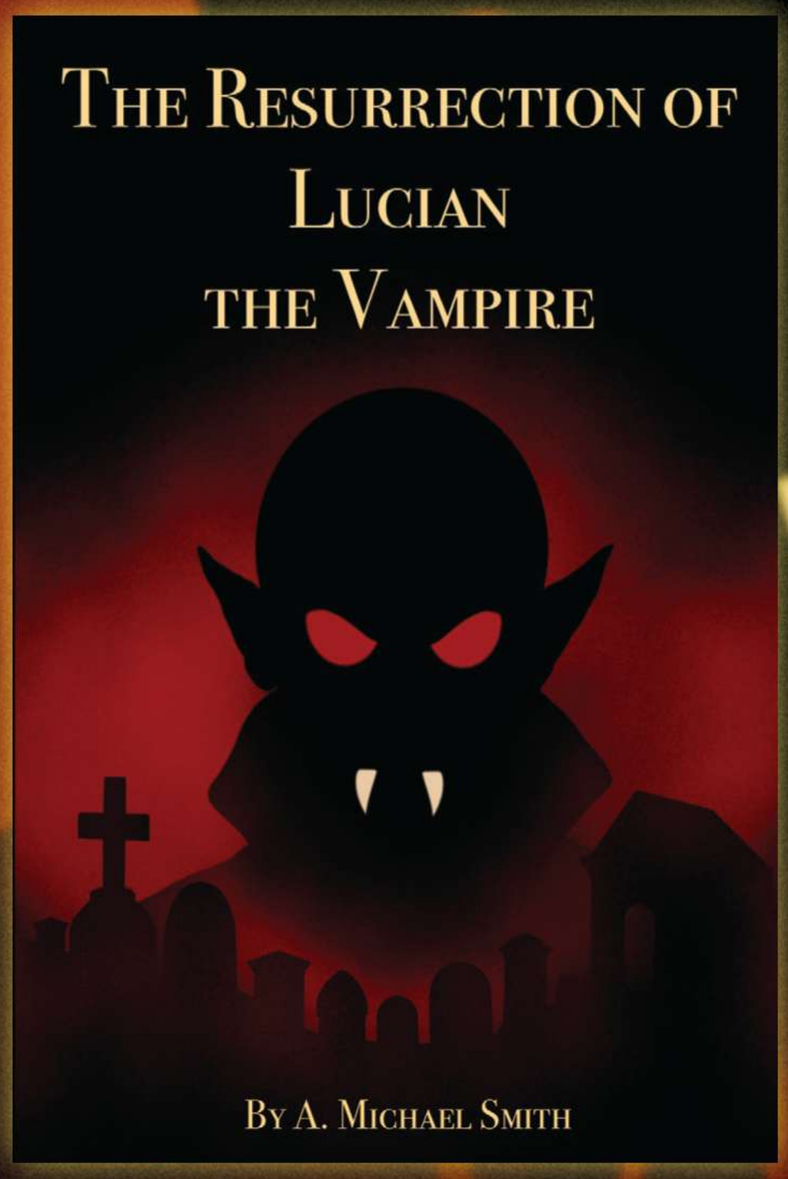

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Michael Gingold's
Exordium

SLASHING TOWARDS RESPECTABILITY

"I remembered the movie fantasies when I was a kid. They involved teenagers who fell in love, made out with each other, customized their cars, listened to rock and roll, and were rebels without causes. Neither the kids in those movies nor the kids watching them would have understood a world view in which the primary function of teenagers is to be hacked to death."

That was the conclusion of Roger Ebert's *Chicago Sun-Times* review of *Friday the 13th Part 2* back in 1981. At the time, that was the par-for-the-course critical reaction to slasher movies. *Halloween*, of course, received a lot of strong notices, and there was an occasional exception to the rule like *Terror Train* that got some good reviews. But mad-slasher/dead-teenager/woman-in-danger movies (to cite just three of the epithets used by Ebert and his TV partner Gene Siskel) were by and large excoriated, both individually and as a genre. And as I noted in my *Exordium* in Issue 24, quite a few horror fans didn't care for them either.

How times have changed. Neither the critics damning slashers at the time nor this kid reading them could have anticipated a world in which these films had achieved a true cultural impact, one that would be both celebrated and dissected by one of the most eagerly anticipated independent films this year. Jane Schoenbrun's *Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma* (see page 26) is both a comprehensive tribute and a, ahem, penetrating investigation of the psychosexual subtexts, intentional or just as likely not, lurking beneath the surface of those teen killathons.

The specific homages to the *Friday* franchise go beyond the summer-camp setting in the title of both Schoenbrun's film and its movies-within-the-movie. There's a veritable explosion of them in the opening-credits montage charting the history of the *Camp Miasma* franchise. The typefaces and subtitles we see on the saga's video boxes alone are a microcosmic expression of the enduring pervasiveness of the *Friday* flicks in the popular culture.

The attention they earned wasn't all positive, obviously. If "slasher movie" became an all-purpose derogatory term for horror cinema for a while, *Friday the 13th* became the

brand name for the perceived lowest class of fright filmmaking. I've read any number of reviews stating that a movie's gratuitous gore and senseless mayhem make it akin to a *Friday* flick, and interviews in which filmmakers state they're aiming higher than the Jason vehicles, and not just making a mindless gorefest. (A tad ironic given that, in the Paramount entries anyway, the bloodshed was significantly toned down to get them to an R-rated level.)

And yet, back in the '80s when their releases were an annual event, the *Friday the 13th*s were the slasher films everyone knew, not just us horror nerds. Kids who might not have even heard of other studio teen-killers like *Happy Birthday to Me* or *My Bloody Valentine* would tease each other with "*ki, ki, ki, ma, ma, ma.*" If you grew up and especially if you went to summer camp in the Northeast U.S., you might well have had someone tell you they went to the camp where *Friday* was filmed — or in my case, that one of *Part 2*'s actresses had been a counselor at a camp I attended a couple of years earlier. I'd dare say that the *Friday* franchise was even more popular in its day than *Halloween*; the first five sequels in the former collectively grossed significantly more than the second through sixth of the latter.

In that sense, the *Friday*s' '80s success predated current box-office trends, in which the charts are dominated by film follow-ups. The lowest-grossing of the Paramount octet, *Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan* ($14.3 million), did better than practically any other '80s slasher outside the other big franchises (*Halloween* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*). As downmarket a genre as slashers were considered at the time, brand names still ruled.

And yet, Paramount didn't do much to exploit what would later become known as IP in other media. You'd think (and you might be right) that the studio was just a tad embarrassed about these movies, however much they contributed to the bottom line, as very little *Friday* merch emerged in the '80s. Once New Line Cinema took over with 1993's *Jason Goes to Hell*, however, it was a different story. The bloodgates opened, and comics, novelizations and spinoff books, video games, action figures, and more poured through. By the turn of the millennium, a title that, to a number of pundits, had once represented just a step above pornography had become thoroughly mainstreamed.

Along the way, these films also became worthy of serious critical study and exhaustive chronicling. In 1992, author/academic Carol J. Clover analyzed *Friday the 13th* and its genre contemporaries (including the even more notorious *I Spit on Your Grave*) through a feminist lens in her seminal *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* — which, among other things, introduced the term "final girl" into the lexicon. Thirteen years later saw the publication of *Crystal Lake Memories: The Complete History of "Friday the 13th,"* in which Peter M. Bracke bestowed the franchise with a coffee-table oral history of the type usually reserved for more "respectable" fare. Once, print and TV critics lambasted and dismissed the series in general; now, countless articles and debates sprung up online, from both reviewers and fans, regarding which of the *Friday*s were the best. (I've said it before and I'll say it again: *Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives >>> Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter.*)

During this time, the slasher genre began re-evaluating itself on screen as well, though with its high-school milieu and white-masked villain (not to mention on-screen excerpts), *Scream* took *Halloween* as its touchstone more than the *Friday* films. Any number of chillers in the past four decades have aped those movies' setting and m.o. with a straight face, and it took a while for a couple of noteworthy deconstruction/reconstructions to emerge: Todd Strauss-Schulson's marvelous, underappreciated *The Final Girls* (2015) and Chris Nash's *In a Violent Nature* (2024).

And now we have *Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma*, whose dive into the undercurrents of the *Friday the 13th*s goes as deep as the lake beside the titular locale. It's intriguing to imagine what the late Ebert, who loathed the *Friday*s but appreciated Wes Craven's meta approach in the first two *Scream*s and *New Nightmare*, would have made of it.

BUMMING OUT EBERT: *FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 2* SKEWERED TEENS (PRECEDING PAGE) AND CHILLED MRS. VOORHEES' HEAD, TO THE LAMENTATION OF 1981 FILM CRITICS.

SceneQueen

IT'S THE PICTURES THAT GOT SMALL... LITERALLY!

OUR INTREPID REPORTER INVESTIGATES THE BUDDING WORLD OF VERTICAL MICRODRAMAS.

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

In my column about short-form content for Issue 30, I mentioned the recent industry boom of vertical microdramas. Verticals are the minutes-long serials produced in vertical format, intended to be watched on a phone, and it's a billion-dollar global business that continues to grow. My interest was piqued, so I said to my agent, "Put me up for a vertical."

A role came up for a vampire who's also a bossy dean of students, so they thought, "Well, that's Barbara Crampton." When I agreed to do it, I didn't realize at the time that Fango contributor, Chainsaw Awards director and journeyman filmmaker Michael Varrati was the writer, and Sam Irvin, a legend who's been in the business forever, was the director. The shoot also allowed me to reunite with my *Chopping Mall* costar Russell Todd. I was working with my people!

The vertical is called *Bad Blood*, and it's one of the first out from Hybrid LLC, which has until now made mostly holiday TV movies. It's a compelling vampire mystery about a woman enrolling in college to investigate who killed her childhood best friend. My character is named Carmilla, after the lesbian vampire from the 1872 novella *Carmilla* by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, which was Sam's contribution. Michael's script is excellent, and Sam was of such good

L-R: *BAD BLOOD* DIRECTOR SAM IRVIN WITH STARS KYLE MICHAEL, JONAH WALKER AND CASIE MAGHRAN.

THE AUTHOR (RIGHT) WITH IRVIN.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BARBARA CRAMPTON

humor on the set, making it a very positive experience for everyone. I worked with three wonderful young actors (Kyle Michael, Jonah Walker and Casie Maghran) who, together, have performed in over 80 verticals!

We shot in Calabasas at a lovely mansion, and also at Pierce College. I wasn't sure what I would be getting into, but it was a very professional set, with a terrific costume department and lighting team, a crew made up of pros who have been in the business for decades, and one of the best makeup artists I've ever worked with. We had a week to shoot, so I knew I had to come in performance-ready. I was in five scenes in one day, with lots of dialogue and very little rehearsal. It reminded me of the soap operas I used to make earlier in my career.

Something interesting about the vertical format is that there's very little camera movement. The cameras were stationary for all my scenes, and I would walk into the frame, say my dialogue, and walk off. They had two cameras, one pointed at me and one pointed at my costar. When it was time for Kyle's dialogue, they had me "stack up close behind him" so I could fit in the frame. When I seemed skeptical, Kyle assured me, "I know it sounds weird, but it's going to look amazing." So I trusted him!

Kyle says of the project, "Playing Elias in *Bad Blood* felt special from the start. I've done a lot of verticals, but this one really pushes the format into new territory and gives audiences the feel of a true horror feature right on their phones. Sam brought such a strong vision to the project, and the cast and crew worked incredibly hard to make something fresh. I think *Bad Blood* could be a major step forward for horror in the vertical space, and I'm delighted to be at the forefront."

Michael and Sam agree! "I love vampire stories," Michael says. "I have a long history of doing holiday films and thrillers with Hybrid, but this was our first team-up in the world of the undead, and I wanted to make sure I got it right, both for the format, but also the genre. The story is feature-length, but the nature of the vertical meant we were also able to lean on serialized moments, honoring the tradition of *Buffy* and *Dark Shadows* with fang-filled cliffhangers."

Sam adds, "I literally wept tears of joy when I got hired to direct *Bad Blood*, from a terrific script by my dear friend Michael Varrati – who is just as much of a horror fanboy as I am. Every single minute of this adventure was a dream come true for me, especially getting to direct you and to become instant friends – bonding over our childhood passion for *Dark Shadows*!"

Hybrid producer Peter Sullivan makes a good point about the vertical explosion: "We recognize that audiences for the kinds of stories we've been telling for the past twenty years are increasingly consuming content on mobile devices. Our strategy is to meet them there with the same high caliber of talent, writing, and production value they're used to. Moving into the vertical format isn't an either/or choice between traditional movies and mobile storytelling; the core filmmaking skills translate directly. A traditional 90-minute thriller and an 80-episode vertical drama like *Bad Blood* ultimately solve the same creative challenge: keeping audiences hooked on a compelling story. We're still approaching this as filmmakers, bringing that same cinematic sensibility and storytelling experience to an exciting emerging format."

And that's exactly right. As the industry continues to shift, I hear a lot of my understandably worried colleagues complaining, wishing everything could just stay the same. But to survive in any industry, you have to shift with it. You have to be flexible and adapt to emerging trends. Learn more about how audiences are consuming their entertainment, and try to work within that framework. Verticals are one way to do that, and I think horror is a perfect genre for the format. I hope we see more of them in the future.

ALL-STAR TEAM-UP: CRAMPTON, IRVIN, AND SCREENWRITER MICHAEL VARRATI.

PREPARE FOR AN ONSLAUGHT

FANS OF *YOU'RE NEXT* AND *THE GUEST*, REJOICE: YOU'RE ABOUT TO GET THE MOST ADAM WINGARD MOVIE EVER MADE.

BY PHIL NOBILE JR.

ONSLAUGHT'S TEST SUBJECTS ARE ON THE LOOSE, AND CELESTE (ADRIA ARJONA, OPPOSITE AND BELOW) HAS HER WORK CUT OUT FOR HER.

This is said with affection and respect for the *Godzilla/Kong* epics that director Adam Wingard has delivered over the years: His new film *Onslaught*, out this fall from A24, feels very much like the work of a man who is dying to get away from the studio IP sandbox for a minute.

"I've been making franchise studio IP pictures for nearly the last ten years," the director says. "When you're working in a franchise, you're working under somebody else's filmmaking rules. And those rules are flexible and you can bring your style to it, but at the end of the day you have to follow those rules." Wingard adds, "And even though I had a great time, those films were also PG-13. I was really ready to cut loose. I wanted to remind people of who I really am as a filmmaker."

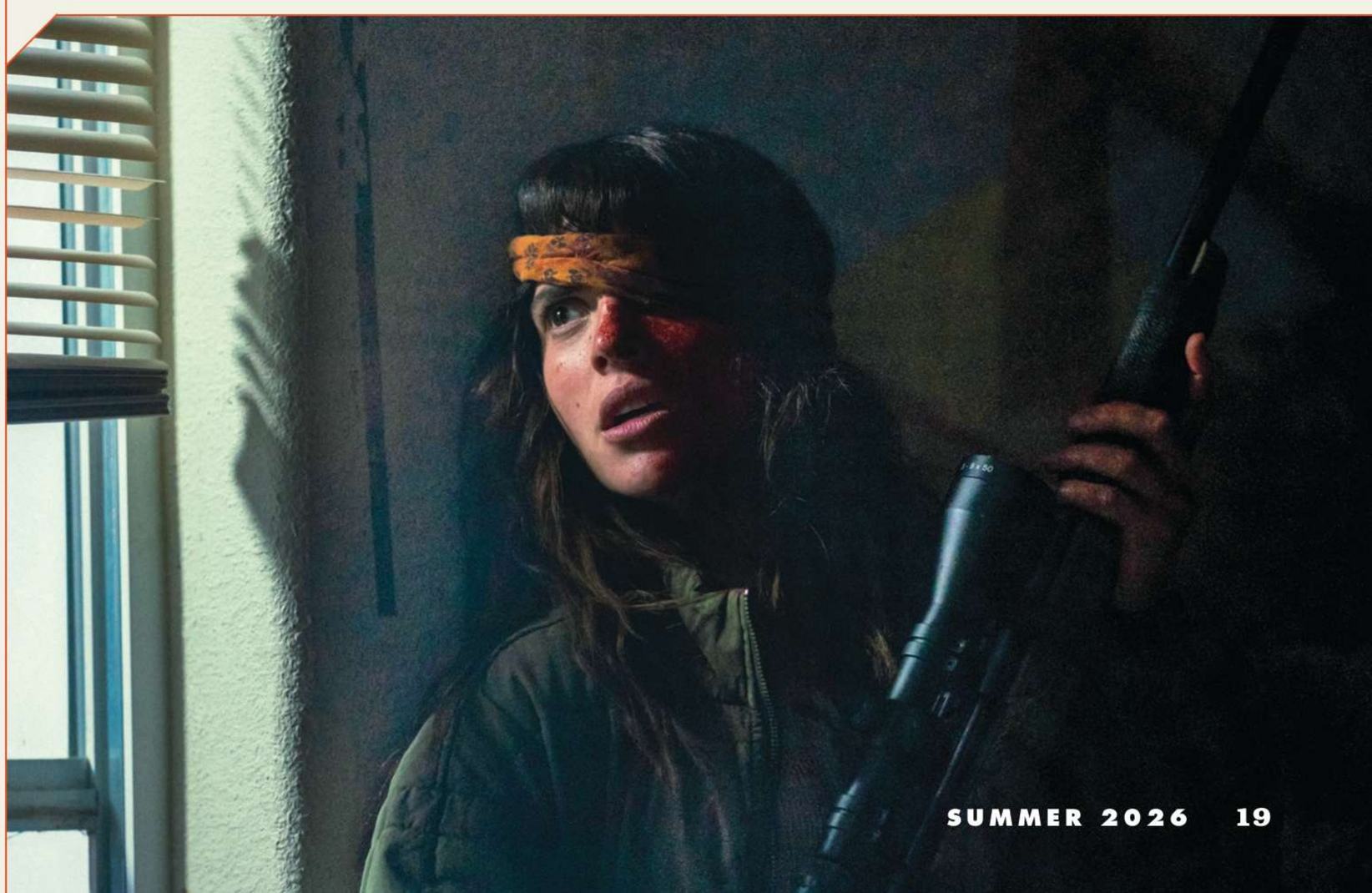
Indeed, *Onslaught* feels genetically engineered to communicate to its viewers that it was, from top to bottom, made by very specific humans. Humans with sick ideas and deranged imaginations and final cut on the film. In a secret United States government facility in the desert, an eccentric Nazi scientist is perfecting the creation of unstoppable killing machines, using a trio of military personnel who've had all traces of humanity scientifically scrubbed out of them. The scientist succeeds all too well, as the subjects escape containment and set about slaughtering everyone in their path — including the residents of a middle-of-nowhere trailer park, led by a veteran with a stash of weapons and plenty of military experience of her own.

Setting the stage for what's maybe the goriest bit of social commentary since a George A. Romero zombie movie, Wingard has reteamed with his producer/co-writer Simon Barrett for a siege thriller that almost feels as if they're picking up where they left off with 2014's *The Guest*.

"I WANTED TO MAKE A FILM THAT, WHEN YOU LOOK BACK 20, 30 YEARS FROM NOW, IT FELT LIKE A TIMESTAMP OF THE MOMENT. AND BOY DOES IT EVER."

- ADAM WINGARD -

"I saw this film as taking place in the same universe as *You're Next* and *The Guest*," says Wingard. "It's almost like it completes this trilogy; each one of those films has an aspect about the military industrial complex, secret programs, and the way that those things feed into these different horror themes. I think this is a crowd-pleasing movie. But at the same time, I think it's much darker than those films."



PHOTOS BY RICHARD FOREMAN, COURTESY OF WRONG TRAILER PARK LLC, ONSLAUGHT RIGHTS LLC. & A24

DREW STARKEY IS AN ECCENTRIC GOVERNMENT AGENT TASKED WITH CHASING DOWN (AND CLEANING UP AFTER) THE ESCAPED KILLING MACHINES.

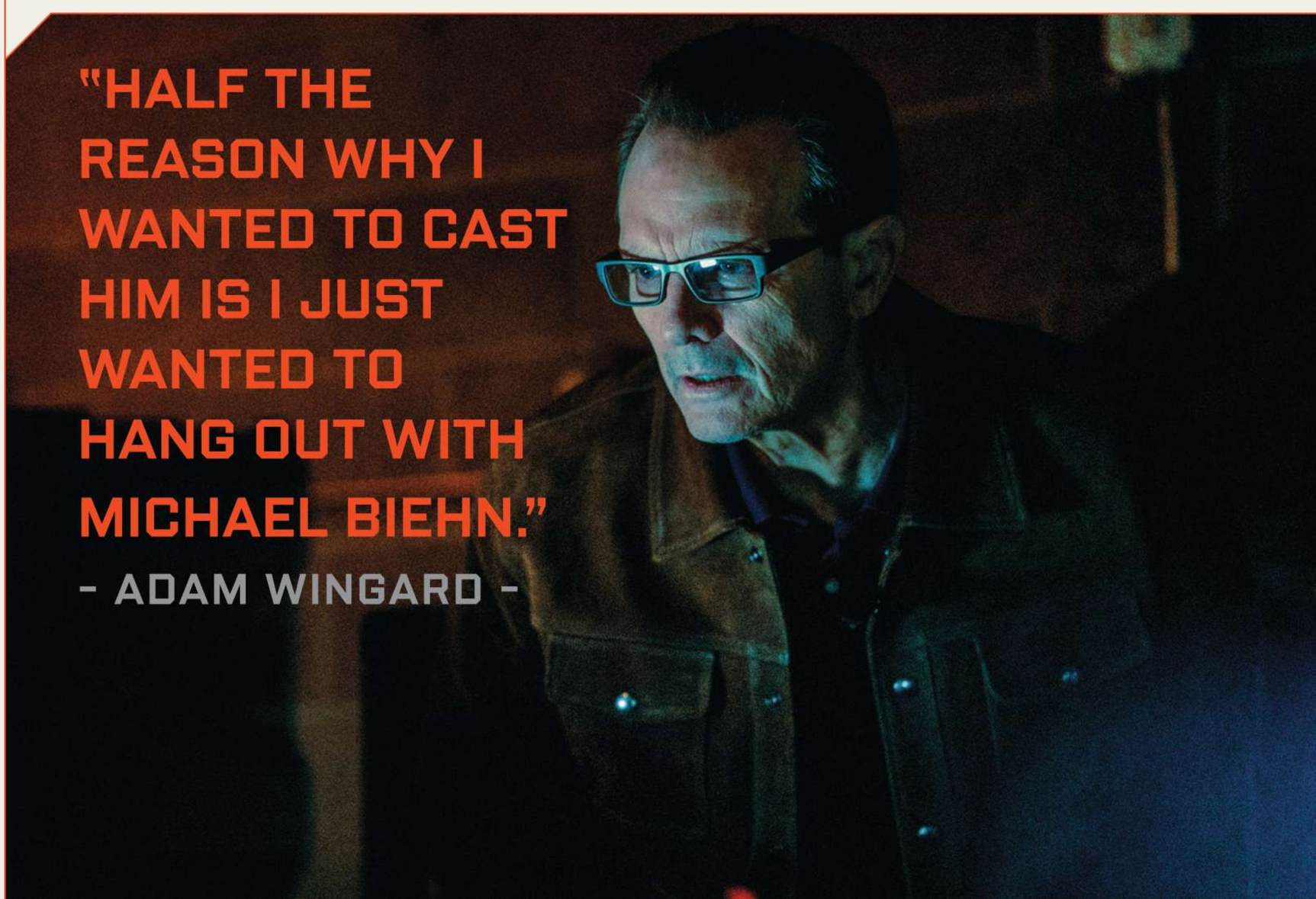
Wingard's return to form is not a solitary one; he's brought with him previous collaborators Dan Stevens (*The Terror*, *Legion*) and Rebecca Hall (*The Night House*, *Resurrection*) and new-to-him Drew Starkey (*Queer*, *Hellraiser*), each making an absolute meal out of characters that feel as if they've bounced off every corner of psychotronic cinema to land on the screen before us. Spoilers are being avoided here, but a movie in which these three characters just talk to each other for 90 minutes would be pure bliss; that they're more or less accoutrements for an action-heavy gorefest is part of what makes *Onslaught* so special.

But if you're expecting the Dan Stevens from *The Guest* or even the *Godzilla/Kong* universe, this movie has a surprise for you. "We really wanted to give him something transformative," Wingard reveals. "My previous collaborations with him were always playing extremely handsome, charming characters. When we came up with this character the thesis was 'let's see if we can give Dan the most despicable, awful character and see if he still can manage to make it charming.' He did. Even though he's a slimy weirdo and we make him look fucking crazy, there's still this residual Dan Stevens charm that still comes through, and I love that."

Hall, Wingard's go-to voice of reason in his *Godzilla/Kong* films, gets to go a little crazy here as well, and Wingard laughs as he shares that the actress' chameleonic skills were on display in front of him years ago. "I literally met her on *The Guest* and didn't realize it. I'd seen her films but I wasn't expecting Rebecca Hall to be on set. She was friends with Dan and at one point she was on set watching his kids, just helping out."

Wingard continues, "A year later, I was watching the *Christine* movie that she starred in, and I thought she was amazing. And after it was over, I said to Simon, 'Wow, Rebecca is amazing. She'd be one of my top people to work with.' And he goes, 'You know you've met her, right? She was on the set of *The Guest*.' And I was like, 'Oh, my God.'"

Another Wingard staple in *Onslaught* is a star-making performance from a resourceful heroine. *You're Next* had Sharni Vinson as secret badass Erin, *The Guest* started Maika Monroe on a genre journey that's still turning heads (see *Victorian Psycho*, page 22), and this film gives us Adria Arjona as Celeste Cross, a military veteran



and divorced mom who's lacking some interpersonal skills, but whose combat savvy comes in handy during the film's *Assault On Precinct 13*-tinged third act.

"This is a character who has a lot of PTSD. She's a reluctant parent, doesn't really feel at home anywhere. And she's almost a recluse, a hermit hiding out in this trailer park. Adria was just the absolute perfect choice because she understood what was interesting about this character," Wingard says. "And on the other side of that, she had to really seem capable. Adria drives a big truck. She loves shooting guns. She authentically loves it; it's not just another role. She has that thing that we all loved about Sigourney Weaver in the '80s. And it's something you can't fake. I'm just excited to be working with her at this point in her career; people are going to look back on this in 20 years and be like, 'Oh, yeah, that was around the time where Adria was blowing up and she did that movie.' I think it's going to be one of those roles."

When Barrett and Wingard scripted the film, there was one bit of dream casting they had in mind. "We specifically wrote the part of Baylor for Michael Biehn. This is a crazy, life-fulfilling thing. In 5th or 6th grade, my friends and I were so obsessed with Michael Biehn that we created a Michael Biehn Fan Club. We didn't even know how to say his name properly. We were a bunch of Alabama kids so we called him 'Michael Bayhan' or something. But I remember writing on a piece of paper 'The Michael Biehn Fan Club.' I used to do my hair like him. I was obsessed with him," Wingard laughs. "Half the reason why I wanted to cast him is I just wanted to hang out with Michael Biehn, which I did. And now I'm friends with him, which feels so surreal. And I love him. I even got him to sign my *Aliens* Hicks action figure. When we had the fires out here in LA, everybody started talking about 'What would I do if the fires came to my house? What would I take if I could only grab a couple things?' And I thought, 'I would take that signed Michael Biehn action figure.'"

The rest of the casting followed a particular bit of inspiration. "We were really influenced by movies like *Tremors*, where you get a lot of interesting, quirky people in a small area and you play with that." To wit, the trailer park cast features Reginald VelJohnson (*Die Hard*) and Eric Wareheim (*Tim & Eric*) in memorable roles. "I think the trailer park setting made that very appealing — all the different personalities that you can play with there. All these American outcasts can naturally populate this place, and it's like a microcosm of our country in some ways."

The sparsely populated, desert-set trailer park scenes place the film in a stark, almost Empire Pictures/Italian exploitation sort of post-apocalyptic tableau — but one that's not set in the future. *Onslaught* audiences might notice they're watching a dystopian nightmare while living in a dystopian nightmare. "I think we *are* in a post-apocalyptic world, if I'm honest," says Wingard. "It feels like the world as we knew it ended during the pandemic, and we've given birth to this new reality that we exist in. This is a movie that reflects that post-pandemic reality." And while *The Guest* raised similar questions about how the United States treats its veterans, *Onslaught*'s themes seem very much updated to the here-and-now, as scenes of masked military personnel gunning down American citizens can't help but carry a certain amount of subtext.

"It was important to me to make a film that spoke to modern fears," Wingard says. "Not everything is always planned, but good art tends to sync up with an expression of the reality that we live in. When we made the movie, ICE wasn't what it is. It was definitely an issue, but it evolved as the production went. And by the time we were in post, I'm looking at this film and I'm like, 'Oh, we made a movie that's somehow extremely current.'"

Wingard stands by the result — his first film on which he's had final cut. "Sometimes it's upsetting to people when you're making something that too closely relates to current events. But I think it's a good thing... one of my main goals with making this picture was I wanted to make a film that, when you look back 20, 30 years from now, it felt like a timestamp of the moment. And boy does it ever."

DESPITE THIS LAYOUT, WE WANT TO ASSURE YOU THAT AT NO POINT IS THE GREAT MICHAEL BIEHN (OPPOSITE) IN DANGER OF BEING SHOTGUNNED BY ARJONA.

SHE'S SUCH A VICTORIAN *Psycho*

ZACHARY WIGON'S HISTORICAL HORROR CENTERS ON WHAT MAIKA MONROE CALLS HER FAVORITE ROLE TO DATE.

BY AHLISSA EICHHORN

It's late September, just north of Dublin, Ireland. Low, wispy fog hovers above acres of deep green grass. The sun has died overhead. A herd of deer forage near the trees in the distance, unperturbed by the sounds of humans emanating from the massive castle that sits on the property. Frost clouds each of its towering windows, like eyes glassed over.

And Maika Monroe is walking towards it with a gun.

This is the second-to-last night here on the set of *Victorian Psycho*, but there's still more mayhem to capture. Before the moon makes an appearance, let's rewind to the early evening hours, when the day's preparations first started.

Taking place in 1858, *Victorian Psycho* tells the lurid tale of Winifred Notty, a woman who struggles to blend in due to her sardonic wit and bursts of violence. After accepting a governess position for the snobbish Pounds family, other staff begin to disappear and suspicions of her increase. Playing the wolfish Winifred is Maika Monroe, cast alongside Thomasin McKenzie and Jason Isaacs. The film is based on the 2025 novella by Virginia Feito, who is also the screenwriter.

Arriving on set first is director Zachary Wigon (*Sanctuary*). He greets everyone with a smile and settles in quickly to chat about his main motivation for leading this genre project.

"What excited me the most about the novel when I first read it was getting inside Winifred's head and understanding Winifred's subjectivity, which Virginia did, obviously, exceptionally well," says Wigon. "It was this impossibility of this serial killer's voice and understanding that this character is a psychopath, but also oddly, strangely, sort of starting to feel like she is the most sensible person in this world. And it's really the world that's mad. The way that was balanced back and forth was what pulled me into the novel."

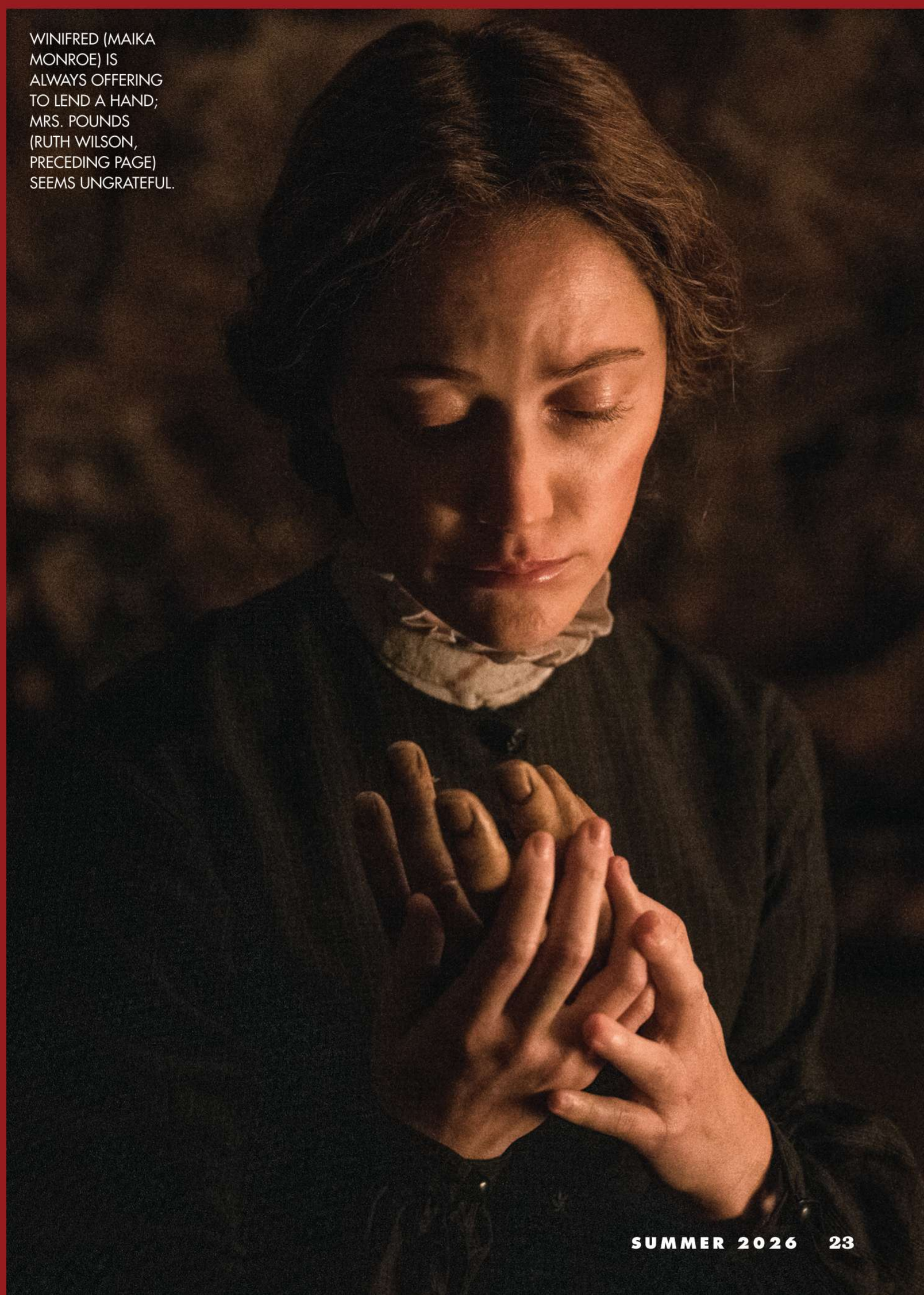
Feito is also there, watching the final stretch of her literary creation jump off the page. Even with its necessary changes, she assures us her screenplay is "close in spirit."

She elaborates. "There's some dialogues that are exactly the same, but there's a lot of differences plot-wise. Some merging of characters, some stuff we had to do practically and logistically. Because the book is almost like a stream of consciousness and we're in her [Winifred's] head all the time, it would be boring if you just copied and pasted it directly into a movie."

Blocking out the sun behind her, the castle looms over all. In both the book and film, this is Ensor House, though it's far grander than what Feito initially wrote. "I don't think I could have imagined such an incredible place so big and imposing," she marvels. "And so specific. The level of detail of everything that they've done with the set design and the colors and the furnishings is… I could have never made that up. It was very surreal, the whole situation. I think the movie is going to be better than the book!"

The castle is impossible to ignore. Built around 1100, the massive estate is a dream come true location. Its dark wood front door invites one into a cavernous foyer that glides into a jaw-dropping three-story staircase landing.

"That staircase is an inner core of everything that's going on. It drives the story and the characters. It's an underbelly," says production designer Jeremy Reed. He traverses across the property, excitedly pointing out every section of the estate he altered to fit the vision. Ripping out carpet, painting walls, covering ceilings, and changing windows is just a snippet of the cosmetic work required. It's evident this location was an exhilarating challenge for him. Reed gestures to a pot containing a wilted plant. "When she [Winifred] comes, we have new plants. What you'll notice



WINIFRED (MAIKA MONROE) IS ALWAYS OFFERING TO LEND A HAND; MRS. POUNDS (RUTH WILSON, PRECEDING PAGE) SEEMS UNGRATEFUL.

PHOTOS BY COURTESY OF BLEECKER STREET

YOU'D BE A PSYCHO TOO IF YOU HAD TO WEAR ALL THIS STUFF IN THE SUMMER HEAT.

towards the end of the film is that all the plants died. I told people to leave them alone. The plants have died because of her, because of her presence in the house. There's some real malevolence in this film."

Indeed, not a detail has been missed in this labyrinth.

The color scheme includes electric plums, apple yellows, and beetle greens, giving the impression of a Corman-Poe production. The staircase is painted in a sprawling pattern that seems to glow from the stained-glass windows. Pieces by 17th century Flemish artists adorn the walls of the corridors. Even with its gilded ornamentation, the castle still feels threatening. It's a fearful maze ideal for housing the secrets of this gritty, perverse story. Outside on the dewy lawn sits the most gorgeous Gothic Revival dog kennel ever made. Its purpose? You'll have to watch the film to find out.

"IT WAS THIS IMPOSSIBILITY OF THIS SERIAL KILLER'S VOICE AND UNDERSTANDING THAT THIS CHARACTER IS A PSYCHOPATH, BUT ALSO ODDLY, STRANGELY, SORT OF STARTING TO FEEL LIKE SHE IS THE MOST SENSIBLE PERSON IN THIS WORLD." -ZACHARY WIGON

In the makeup trailer, all signs of modernity are being removed from Maika Monroe. Tattoos disappear under concealer; her beachy blonde hair swapped for a frizzy brunette wig. Other than physically transforming into Ms. Notty, Monroe worked hard to mold her mindset into a dark, animalistic persona. Her preparation began with Wigon months prior, via Zoom.

"Not only was I working with a dialect coach for accents, but we would read through the script a lot, and he [Zachary] would have me watch a lot of videos," says Monroe. "We'd send videos of different psychopaths back and forth, cool interviews and such. It was probably — not probably, it's definitely — by far my favorite role I've ever done."

For the most part, Monroe's previous roles have been heroes. Becoming this villainous "good for her" genre player isn't to be understated. It's a precarious role, though, as this character walks a painfully thin line between horrible and loveable.

"It's a huge role. It's this big bombastic personality. I was absolutely terrified coming into this because I've never done anything like it," Monroe says. "When I read the script, I'm like, 'Oh my God, I don't know if I can pull this off,' because it's such a hard role. There's so much going on. And I feel like with most roles that I do, there's a part of me in it that I'm able to lean on or use. And this was something... too far removed. Just completely. That's what I love about my job, and why I think it's important to continue to push yourself and challenge yourself. I'm really proud of myself."

The sarcastic tone of the source material is another huge part of the role. Winifred's off-kilter humor is very much embraced by Monroe, who views the film as a comedy in a way. But she made sure to showcase her vulnerability and desire for connection as well.

"Yes, she is a psychopath and clearly mentally unwell, but there's still a real human side that can come out. I'm hoping for the audience to really fall in love with this character."

Hints of Winifred's predilection for homicide appear throughout the set. Sitting in the makeup chair later that day is an actor watching a silicone axe wound on his forehead become more realistic; he'll be murdered on camera in a few hours. Severed body parts peek out of translucent containers and relax on countertops. Reference photos of pale, waifish figures fill the back wall of the makeup trailer. It's tough to discern which ones are meant to be dead or alive at first glance. Shiny lips and ruddy cheeks are the only giveaway.

At last, night swallows up the set. Somewhere near the deer, a giant pipework snake coughs up faux fog. Lighting cranes spotlight the castle, giving the moon an assist. Anticipatory energy hums all around. It may be near closing time for this universe, but the enthusiasm of the cast and crew isn't depleted in the slightest. There's no sense of relief that the end is near, no inkling that this was a chore, but instead a sincere pleasure. A camera operator halts the bustling for a second, noting a disturbance in the gravel near the castle's foundation. Every person here wants this horror story to win.

WINIFRED'S "YOU TALKIN' TO ME?" MOMENT.

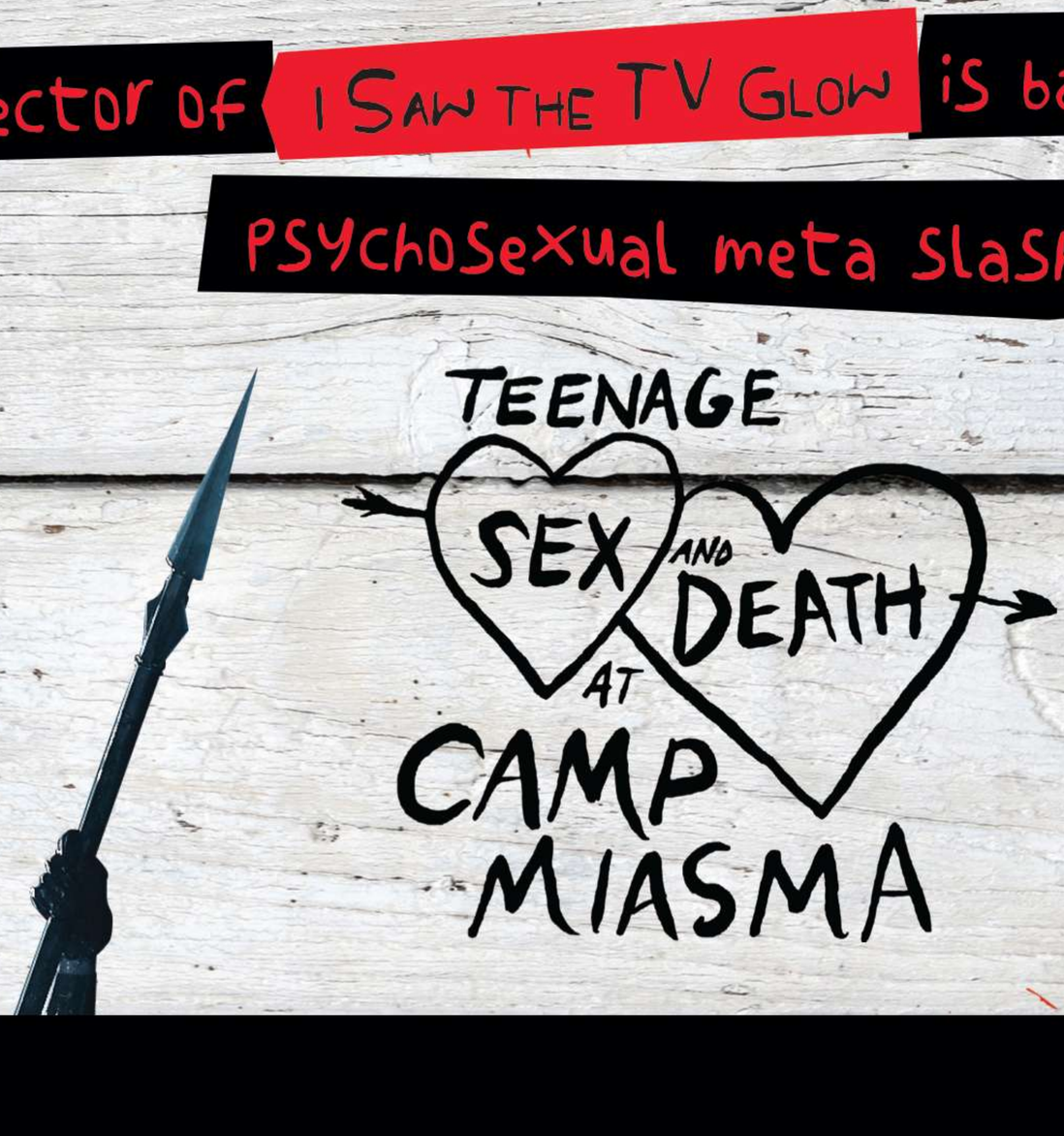
When asked what FANGORIA readers might be surprised by after watching the film, Wigon pauses for a moment before answering. "It's safe to say the film is an unusual constellation of different kinds of horror, filmmaking, and tones," he offers. "I mean, there's true horrific imagery, there's gory imagery, there's psychological horror, there's period drama, there's plenty of humor in it, and there's a kind of wild freneticism to the imagery. The way that all these different cinematic reference points have gotten pulled together in this is something I feel is fairly unique. So, I think the way that these different atmospheres are going to blend together is something that people will be excited by."

Standing out in the grass, Monroe answers a text. A moment later, she drops into the dead, hard stare of Winifred. Her cellphone is replaced with a rifle. Wigon calls out, asking if she's ready. She nods and trains her gaze ahead at the castle. It's time to go psycho. 💀

WE HEAR *VICTORIAN PSYCHO* IS A MUST-SEE.

Little Deaths, Big Swings: Jane Schoenbrun Goes to Camp

The director of *I Saw the TV Glow* is back with the psychosexual meta slasher *Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma*



Jane Schoenbrun brought a deeply personal perspective to creepypasta obsession in *We're All Going to the World's Fair* and *Buffy*-esque genre-TV fandom in *I Saw the TV Glow*, winning critical raves and a legion of devoted followers in their own right. Now the filmmaker has set their sights on the '80s slasher genre and will likely win even more fans with *Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma* (coming to theaters from MUBI August 7).

Camp Miasma is the film-franchise-within-the-film closely modeled on *Friday the 13th*, which queer "Sundance wunderkind" director Kris Williams (Hannah Einbinder) has been tasked with rebooting. A childhood devotee of *Camp Miasma*, Kris is determined to cast Billy Presley (Gillian Anderson), the first entry's final girl who has since become a recluse, and tracks her down to the original filming location of Camp Tivoli. From there, the two women enter into a dance of psycho-erotic gamesmanship, revelations and awakenings as the films' villain, "Little Death," threatens to manifest, and the trans, non-binary Schoenbrun muses on the gender-coding and sexual undercurrents of slasher cinema, while delivering a deliriously stylish homage to those movies.

HORROR'S NEWEST SLASHER ICON? LITTLE DEATH (JACK HAVEN) TEARS INTO *CAMP MIASMA*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MUBI

How did summer-camp slashers in particular inspire and inform the creation of *Teenage Sex and Death at Camp Miasma*?

The sleepover-camp setting is just so essential, right? It's not just *Friday the 13th*, though I feel like that film really put it on the map. Obviously there's also *Sleepaway Camp*, there's *The Burning*, this whole subgenre within the genre. That really spoke to me as the perfect setting. I can speculate about why that's where so many of these movies are set: It has to do with teenage hormones. It's the place where girls can take off their tops and jump in a lake. It's famously the place you come back from and brag about the girl you kissed. It's where kids are asked to kind of confront adult things such as sexuality for the first time, and that felt like the perfect setting for what I was trying to explore.

There are other references littered throughout *Miasma*, and it's very much in conversation with movies like *Psycho* and *The Silence of the Lambs*. The lineage of gender deviance in the horror genre goes back a very long way. Even movies where it's not overtly referenced, like *Friday the 13th* or *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, are clearly so Freudian and so visceral in the way they deal with gender and sexuality, and both the allure and the fear of non-traditional gender expression. It's impossible to look back at those movies now, from a more liberated place, and not be like, 'Whoa, there's a lot of shit going on with gender in the 20th century that we're still unpacking.'

To that end, Billy Presley's first name is gender-neutral, and her last name is that of a masculine icon of pop culture. Can you talk about that, and about conceiving her character?

Well, when we were originally going to shoot the movie on the East Coast, I was going to have her live in Buffalo. So I thought, 'Oh, that'll be funny; Buffalo Billy.' There was going to be a gag about that that I had to rewrite when we ended up filming on the West Coast.

And I never even really asked myself where that last name came from. Elvis is a fascinating person, though I don't know that... I mean, he is a masculine figure, but weren't people also saying, 'He's a pretty boy. He's shaking his hips. That's so effeminate'? I think that even Elvis, as a figure of mid-20th-century masculinity, has some fun gender deviance going on. So I can't say that that last name was a conscious reference, but that was obviously somewhere deep in my mind.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT (KEVIN MCDONALD) CONSOLES A WOULD-BE VICTIM (JORDANA SUMMER) OF LITTLE DEATH.

How much of yourself is in Kris, and are her experiences in the filmmaking scene autobiographical as well?

[*Laughs*] I think I'm poking fun at myself a little bit through that character. Kris is so overintellectual, and she has this tendency to go deep on nerdy trivia neurodivergently, in a way that Billy calls out early in the movie. Kris' journey to get a little bit outside of her head, and figure out her relationship to her body and her sexuality, is certainly something I pulled a lot out of myself for. I was very conscious of making this movie as a trans filmmaker, and wanted Kris to be a cipher for me without actually being me.

The movie is also interested in 2026 Hollywood being this sort of undead zone of IP and remake/reboot culture. It asks questions that aren't so much, 'Oh, aren't we all sick of all these sequels?', but are more about, 'Why *do* we keep remaking these things? Why do we keep retelling these same stories year after year and kind of going through these rituals?' And not only that, but what do these rituals represent? If we look at this sort of libidinal ritual of a new movie every summer where kids get chopped up at a sleepover camp, what are we reifying when we remake that over and over again?

In this way, *Teenage Sex and Death* absolutely is autobiographical in talking about what it means to be a queer leftist artist in an American commercial system. And what it means to try to make something personal, or remake something through a truly new lens, or push a cultural

LITTLE DEATH IS POISED TO KILL AGAIN.

LOVE AMONG THE TREATS: BILLY (GILLIAN ANDERSON) AND KRIS (HANNAH EINBINDER) HAVE A TENDER MOMENT IN THE CHIP AISLE.

conversation forward within that landscape — and whether such a thing is even possible. And in terms of it also being about this filmmaker going insane as she deals with the shittiest people in the world on Zoom calls with Hollywood — yeah, that's definitely autobiographical [*laughs*].

How did you wind up casting Einbinder and Anderson? Did you have them in mind from the beginning?

Gillian was somebody I was absolutely thinking about while I wrote the script. Creating the role of this iconic, larger-than-life, almost femme fatale figure who is both a reclusive mystery and this legendary diva, I wanted her to be played by somebody who the audience would have an association with, and that I had an association with. And getting to know Gillian and having the honor of working with her was surreal from the very beginning. Meeting her for the first time over Zoom, I remember feeling, 'Oh my God, this is someone I've known my whole life,' you know?

I remember watching *The X Files* in fourth grade; that took up such a large part of my world, and Gillian did as well. So the idea of inviting her into this world all these years later and playing on my own memories of who she is, and the cultural memory of her, while also collaborating with her to pull out a performance that is vulnerable and incredibly glamorous and quite personal and exposing in a way I don't know I've seen her do before — that was such an exciting creative journey to embark on.

With Hannah, actually, I believe she had approached us, and I knew her work, and immediately I was like, 'Of course, that's a no-brainer.' Sometimes you get excited about the new energy someone could bring to a role, but in this case I just thought, 'She's so perfect. I literally can't imagine Kris with anyone else's voice now that I've imagined her with Hannah's.'

What really got me excited about working with Hannah, beyond getting to know her and learning what a talented, empathetic artist she is, was watching her stand-up special [*Everything Must Go*], which I hadn't seen before I was thinking about casting her. On *Hacks*, she's so wonderful, and does drama and comedy in a way that feels effortless, but in that special, I saw the freak in her come out a little more than I had elsewhere. She's very much unafraid to go to uncomfortable places; she'll go there for the bit in a way that was immediately apparent, and I thought, 'I can take that impulse and pull something out of her that's crazier than anything she's done before.'

The opening-credits montage is a wonderful slasher-movie media and merch geek-out. We appreciate the reference to the Chainsaw Awards! How did that all come together?

I've got my little Chainsaw Award right over here, actually [Best Limited-Release Film in 2024 for *TV Glow*]. [*Editor's note: Jane never sent us an acceptance video for the Awards; we're glad to learn here that it arrived safely.*] That's just pure childhood stuff. When I was a kid, Halloween was something I started looking forward to in March,

DON'T LET THE ARTINESS SCARE YOU; THERE'S PLENTY OF THE RED STUFF IN *CAMP MIASMA*.

you know? I remember when the Sears catalog would arrive at home that had the Halloween-decorations section at the front; I would steal it from my mom and dig through it and obsessively study those scary things. And I loved the idea of going to a store and being surrounded by Halloween masks and monsters and all that horror stuff.

So when I got to create that opening-credits section, it was like a return to childhood, going lovingly deep into all that ephemera, from the '80s to right now. All those things that made these not just movies or franchises, but worlds you could be obsessed with. Lovingly recreating all that was the most natural thing in the world, and my team did a tremendous job on it. If you had told me as a kid that this was what I would get to do as an adult, I would have said, 'Fuck off, that rocks!'

EINBINDER AND ANDERSON GRAB A SELFIE IN BETWEEN ALL THE BLOODSHED.

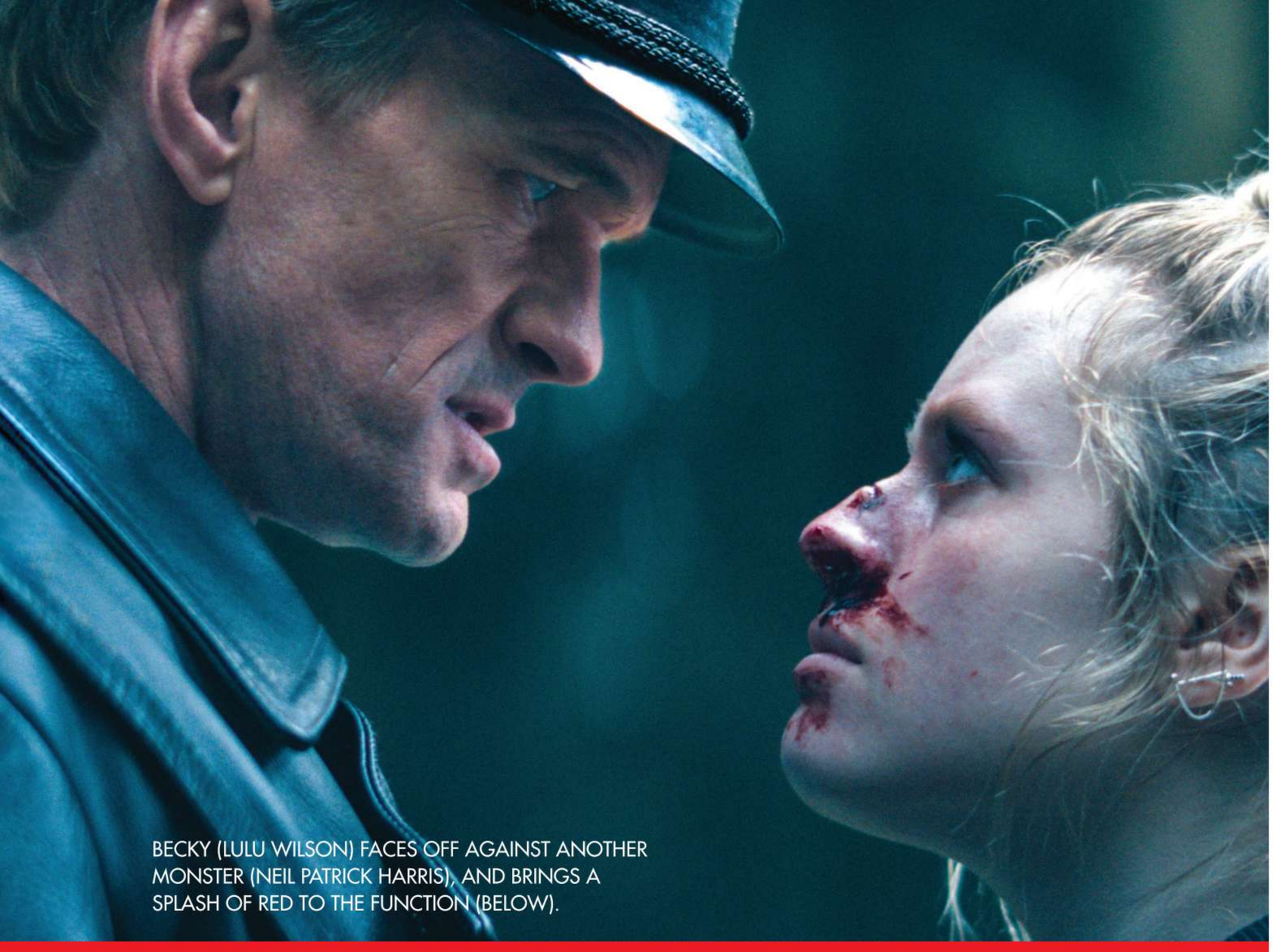
The movie's killer is called "Little Death," a term for orgasm, and there's more than one moment where a sex scene is interrupted. Can you talk about that intersection of sex and death that the title references?

One of the first dialogue exchanges I came up with in thinking about this film was the moment in the movie-within-the-movie where young Billy [Amanda Fix] is in the back of the van with her best friend. She says, 'I'm thinking about what it's going to feel like.' Her friend says, 'Losing your virginity?' and she says, 'No, dying.' The idea of this rite of passage or ritual, going from childhood to adulthood — that seems to be the coming of age that's explored in a lot of these slasher movies. It's like, the virgin survives, and there is some kind of death ritual being enacted through both the loss of innocence or virginity and the summoning of the killer who will murder you for that transgression.

There's something very deep and strange embedded in our culture where we're playing out our shame and desire and our Freudian death drive, and this thing that is both forbidden and desired. I think that is at the heart of the slasher movie. And perhaps when we watch them, we're looking to commune with that in a safe way. There's been tons of writing about this over the years — *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* by Carol Clover, which I first read in college, remained a seminal text for me and was something I revisited in the making of this movie.

In thinking about the killer as 'the little death' — or orgasm — I took that notion very seriously. There's the idea that this force is coming for you, and that sort of sex and death drive has always been there, and that is what has been inspiring the movies rather than the movies inspiring these feelings. That was always one of the film's core ideas; it's a hard thing to put into words, because it's trying to speak something that people from Georges Bataille to Sigmund Freud have been trying to articulate for centuries. Borrowing the language of the slasher film can help illuminate that in a way that gets at something that's been lurking in plain sight in those movies for decades.

This conversation was edited for length and clarity.



BECKY (LULU WILSON) FACES OFF AGAINST ANOTHER MONSTER (NEIL PATRICK HARRIS), AND BRINGS A SPLASH OF RED TO THE FUNCTION (BELOW).

CLOSURE IS KEY: UNLOCKING THE LAST TEMPTATION OF BECKY

STAR LULU WILSON AND DIRECTOR JENN WEXLER OPEN UP ABOUT THE LATEST INSTALLMENT OF THIS SCRAPPY FRANCHISE.

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

At the close of 2023's *The Wrath of Becky*, fans of Lulu Wilson's teen avenger were left with a pair of big questions: 1) After dispatching two groups of neo-Nazis and being recruited by CIA operative Kate Montana (Kate Siegel), where was our heroine going next? And 2) Were we ever going to find out the purpose of the mysterious key that served as the MacGuffin in the first two *Beckys*?

The Last Temptation of Becky, set to open late summer/early fall from Quiver Distribution following its world premiere at the Fantasia International Film Festival, answers both concerns big time. Having demonstrated an unwillingness to follow rules/orders and a violent streak a mile wide, Becky is dispatched to Poland to gather intel on a modern Reich led by General Wilhelm Reuss (Neil Patrick Harris). Reuss has gotten ahold of that key, and plans to put it to its nefarious purpose; cue another round of over-the-top, ass-kicking mayhem, leading to a truly outrageous climactic setpiece.

Through it all, Wilson carries the film with a ferocious performance that she also aimed to ground in genuine emotion. "With every *Becky* movie," she says, "it's been important for me to develop her beyond just being an angry teenage girl. In this last installment, I wanted to show that she's in a totally different part of her life and doing totally different things, but has also grown as a person. She's gone through all of this trauma, and I wanted it to be clear how it has affected her. She was 13 in the first one, and she's 18 in *Last Temptation*, so it's been a great bit of time with this trauma marinating in her, and only getting crazier."

Directing this latest installment is Jenn Wexler, whose previous features *The Ranger* and *The Sacrifice Game* also dealt with young women confronting severely distressing situations. Thus, it was a natural for *Becky* franchise producer Chadd Harbold, who had shared that position with Wexler on Larry Fessenden's *Depraved* and Ana Asensio's *Most Beautiful Island*, to share the *Last Temptation* script with her.

"Knowing my previous work and my love of teen girls in the horror space, he felt I would be a good fit for it," says Wexler, who made it her mission to bring this *Becky* to the next level. "The

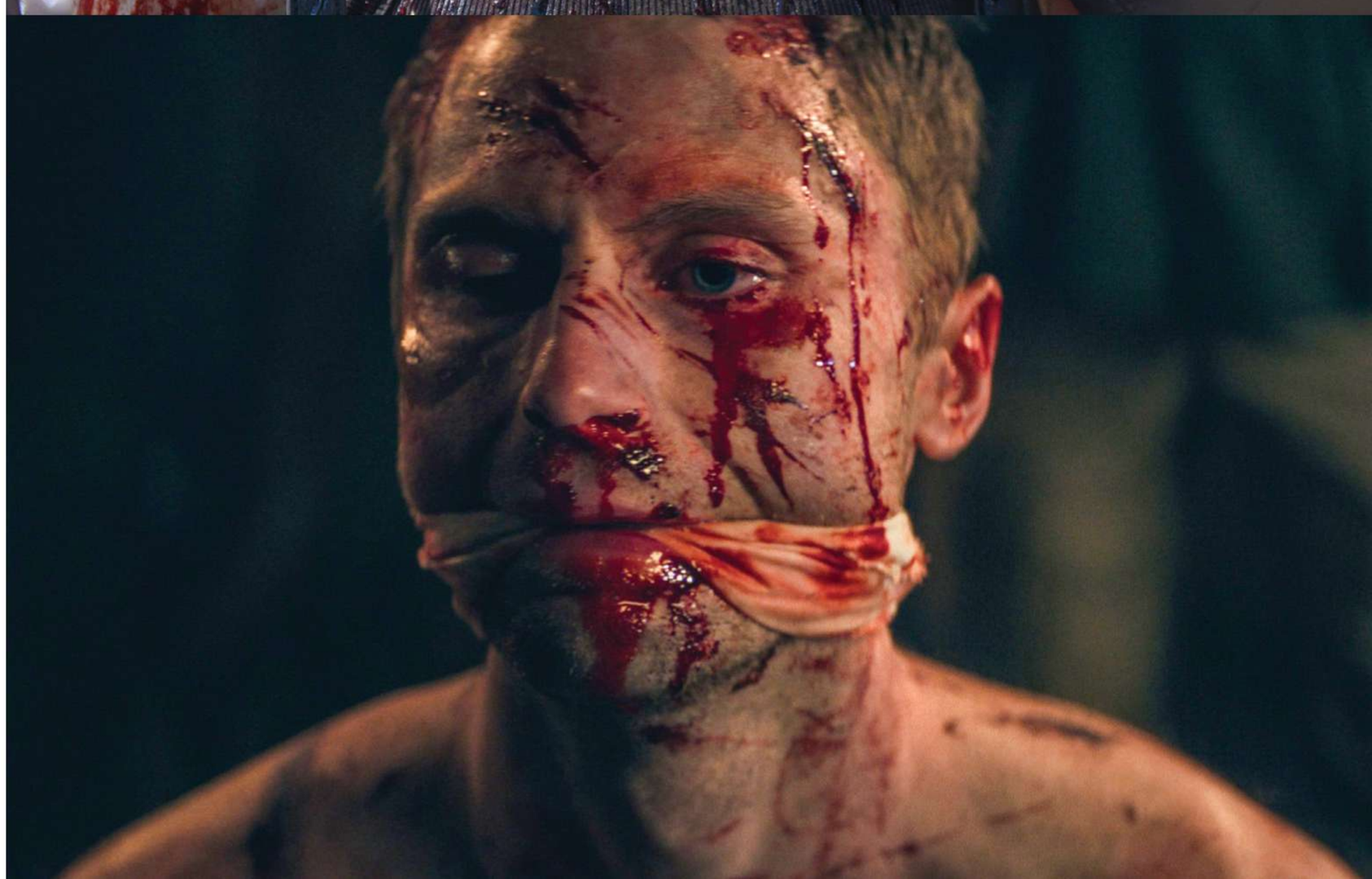
first one took a very serious tone, and *Wrath* pushed it in a pulpier, poppier direction and got a little bit wilder. So my early conversations with Lulu and the producers were like, 'We have to go even more wild.' The script laid out where we were going to end up, so anytime we were thinking tonally about, 'Is this too much?', it was like, 'Well, this is where we're headed. So no, it's not too much. Let's keep pushing it.' That involved everything from the look and the color and the music to the blood and the gore and the explosions. We were always saying, 'How can we push this and make it even bigger?'"

The casting of *How I Met Your Mother* and the *Harold & Kumar* trilogy's Harris continues the *Becky* trend of actors best known for comedic work essaying the lead villains, following Kevin James and Seann William Scott. "How can you not be a fan of Neil Patrick Harris?" Wilson says. "Just watching him on screen before I met him, he's so charismatic, and he can do things I wouldn't even think of. But seeing him actually work — and I've said this about Kevin James and Sean William Scott — it's that switch between when we're on camera and he's being so terrible, and then 'Cut,' and he's like, 'Are you OK? Like, what can I do?' That just says so much about an actor. It was honestly bone-chilling to watch Neil make that switch, because he did it so well. I'm excited for people to see him and how horrifying he can be, because he really goes there."

Where Reuss eventually goes in *Last Temptation of Becky* won't be revealed here, but it will satisfy all the franchise followers who've been wondering what's up with that key. It certainly did for Wexler. "That was part of why I wanted to come on board," she recalls. "Without spoiling anything, we've waited three films to get to this moment, and I was very happy when I read the script and saw how the key paid off."

"In interviews for first *Becky* and *Wrath of Becky*, they always asked me if I knew what the key was for, and I didn't," Wilson says. "I kind of felt that frustration alongside the character — like, what is this fucking key for? Can we figure this out? And my Instagram DMs have been full of, 'What's the key for?' 'Where's *Becky 3*? Are we going

AGENT FOX (DESMOND EASTWOOD) AND BECKY ARE LOCKED AND LOADED, BUT (BELOW AND BOTTOM) THAT DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE ENOUGH.



to find out about the key?' So I'm excited for people to discover what it's about. I feel like in a lot of movies, there's that one element that's never explained; we've been lucky enough to get three movies, so we're able to explore it."

Over the course of that trilogy, Wilson adds, "One of the things I've had the most fun with is the stunts, because they're a huge challenge. No matter how physically fit I am, I still have to remember choreography and also make it fast and believable. Luckily, we had an amazing stunt team on *Last Temptation*."

"Well, I just want to take a moment to talk about how great Lulu is with stunts," Wexler adds. "It was amazing, because she would go off with the stunt coordinator, and they would do their prep. And then I would come in with the DP [Julia Swain] and watch, and we were taken aback, because it wasn't like she was doing little pieces; she did the whole thing. It would be a 10-minute sequence that she would do the entirety of. It was awesome watching Lulu kill all that."

It's that commitment to the role that has helped Becky attain a cult status that no one could have seen coming when the original movie was made — including the actress playing her. "I am so happy that this has happened," Wilson says. "I remember filming the first one, and I had never done a project quite like it before. Being so young, a lot of the auditions I was getting were for characters who were a little bit meek. If there was anything scary, they'd be running away from it, not fighting, and someone else would fight their battles. So *Becky* was a unique script, and I was immediately attracted to it. And that was one of my favorite filming experiences ever; even on the weekends, I remember feeling, 'I don't need this. I don't need Saturday and Sunday off. Let's just keep going.' And especially now that the first two movies are on more streaming services, more people are watching them. I don't think I would have ever expected this, but I'm beyond thrilled that it has turned out this way."

PHOTOS BY COURTESY OF QUIVER DISTRIBUTION

WHEN NOT DIRECTING, JENN WEXLER MOONLIGHTS AS A PARALYSIS SLEEP DEMON.

"ANYTIME WE WERE THINKING, 'IS THIS TOO MUCH?', IT WAS LIKE... 'NO, IT'S NOT TOO MUCH. LET'S KEEP PUSHING IT.'" - JENN WEXLER

BECKY BOUT TO BRING A BEATDOWN.

TIME TO PLAY:

CLIVE BARKER'S HELLRAISER REVIVAL

aims to bring Clive Barker's rich mythos to a new medium — with the help of the writer's longtime collaborator.

BY TODD GILCHRIST

Over four decades, *Hellraiser* has developed a mythology with as many stories to tell as there are nails in Pinhead's skull.

Starting with his 1987 film of the same name, horror luminary Clive Barker's 1986 novella *The Hellbound Heart* has inspired eleven films, two novels, several anthologies, more than a dozen comic series and a potential TV show in development. That canon will additionally expand to include *Hellraiser: Revival*, a single-player video game produced by Saber Interactive where fans can finally become explorers in the further regions of experience. The game follows Aidan Lynch, a member of a biker gang who follows his girlfriend Sunny into Hell after a lovemaking session between them involving a supernatural puzzle box unwittingly unleashes the sadomasochistic Cenobites and the fanatical members of the cult surrounding them, the Scarlet Church.

Reprising his role as Barker's mainstay antagonist, the booming-voiced, metal-plated Pinhead, Doug Bradley promises more from the forthcoming first-person game than a retread of franchise highlights. "I was expecting to be walking up and recording the greatest hits," Bradley tells FANGORIA. "'We'll tear your soul apart.' 'Time to play.' Who could forget 'No tears, please. It's a waste of good suffering.' And that old favorite we used to love so much, 'Your suffering will be legendary.' But it wasn't that at all. It was substantial to the extent that it almost felt to me like I was being confronted by a whole new movie script."

SUCH SIGHTS: *HELLRAISER: REVIVAL* PRESENTS IMAGERY (THIS PAGE AND FACING) BOTH FAMILIAR AND BRAND NEW TO FANS.

Bradley's initial skepticism was well-earned; he'd previously participated in at least two *Hellraiser* game projects that failed to come to fruition. "The first one was 30 years ago when we were doing reshoots on [*Hellraiser: Bloodline*]," he recalls. "I did a day's blue screen filming for a proposed *Hellraiser* video game in full makeup and costume. I got paid and the check didn't bounce, but I never heard another word about it." Another opportunity arose 30 years later when Boss Games contracted him to record lines for an original *Hellraiser* game, but by what he calls "circuitous" roots — "which involved an initial recording session and a strange dance with NFTs" — Bradley's dialogue was with his permission plugged into downloadable content since removed from Behaviour Interactive's multiplayer game *Dead by Daylight*.

"The actual *Hellraiser* video game went quiet, and then it suddenly came back up again — and now it had a name: *Hellraiser: Revival*." Bradley's confidence was buoyed by the inclusion of a pivotal collaborator. "I was being told that Clive had had an involvement in it," he says.

"They are not just 'villains' in *Hellraiser*. They are integral to the core idea the entire story is built around, and their visual design is so distinct and iconic — especially Pinhead, who is easily recognizable." - Emil Esov

Unfettered by those earlier attempts, *Revival* director Emil Esov says that the conception of the game was a research-intensive process that involved looking at existing texts across all existing media and narrowing that catalog of references to the works that inspired his team the most. "There is a lot of *Hellraiser* out there," Esov says. "We did a deep dive and tried to deconstruct it all to understand the building blocks of *Hellraiser* — stuff like narrative themes, core ideas, character development, visual and audio design." Esov says he thrilled at the chance to enlist Barker's participation, not just as an expert on the material but a compass of sorts to tell them when their original ideas were headed in the right direction.

"We did not want this to be just something that we run with that is

based on Clive's works," says Esov. "So we came up with a story about chains of desire, the endless void that we all feel inside and the need to satisfy it, and we presented this to Clive and he was very receptive." The director continues, "He provided great feedback and ideas to tweak the story at the start of the process, and later transitioned into more of an advisory role. He basically empowered us to take this idea and make it into something you can play."

As codified as the series' mythology has become over the past 40 years, Barker's creativity on the page often explores dreamlike or disorienting ideas. In a game, however, geography must be concrete and navigable. "Clive Barker's surreality thrives on uncertainty of space, while gameplay design and systems usually require spatial clarity," Esov agrees. The director says that *Revival* attempts to invoke the surreal aspects of *Hellraiser* via their design of the Labyrinth. "The player experiences the real world for the most part, with clear rules of level design, but then we transition to the Labyrinth that plays with minds and breaks some of these typical rules."

Barker's insight proved crucial. "The lore of *Hellraiser* is rich enough that you could easily get lost in it and create a bloated mess by trying to include every cool detail," Esov says. Because of that deluge of material — and the fact that this was going to be the first ever standalone *Hellraiser* game — Saber Interactive decided to mostly stick to Barker's original "intellectual property-defining" work, specifically his original novella and the first two feature films. "We wanted this to feel like it could come directly from the mind of Clive Barker."

Unsurprisingly, that perspective demanded that Bradley's seminal character and his fellow mischief-makers dominate — or at least oversee — the game's rogue's gallery. "We had to have the original Cenobites in the game," Esov insists. "They are not just 'villains' in *Hellraiser*. They are integral to the core idea the entire story is built around, and their visual design is so distinct and iconic — especially Pinhead, who is easily recognizable."

Though the first film was adapted from Barker's own *The Hellbound Heart*, Bradley suggests that his initial partnership with the author-turned filmmaker on Pinhead turned out successfully because of the ten-plus years of theater the two of them had done together before then. Although he wasn't directly privy to Barker's input on *Revival*, the actor says that the script for the game evoked memories of their collaboration while taking respectful new liberties. "I suspected Clive's hand on the tiller here, in a good way, moving the character in directions that we hadn't really seen him before, other than maybe in [Barker's 2015 novel] *The Scarlet Gospels*."

This time recording his lines of dialogue in a studio without the rigamarole of a costume and make-up — "the latex and the paint and the hairdryers and the poking and the prodding and the distinctive odors of all those things" — Bradley admits that getting back into character was a challenge. "Now I'm in jeans and a T-shirt, having just got out of my car and trying to find my way into it," he says. "Plus, it's coming up on 24 years since I last played the character in *Hellworld*. So it was a challenge to come back to it."

From his perspective, Esov says he didn't notice his star face any difficulties reprising the role. "Doug was awesome," he says. "He is a wonderful actor, and easy to work with… from the way he brought Pinhead to life once more, I had an impression that it was like riding a bike for him. His performance is so stoic and commanding, it was a pleasure to see him in action."

"I give full credit to the game people for clearly taking Clive's input and being prepared to develop a whole new story and move in new directions," replies Bradley. "I don't want to give the impression that all the familiar personnel and accoutrement of *Hellraiser* have been jettisoned, because they haven't at all. There's plenty that will be very, very familiar to fans. But credit to them for not resting on past laurels but being prepared to go into new areas with it."

Calling all of the four original Cenobites "precious to me," Esov coyly says that each of them appears in *Revival* "in one way or another." Yet

DOUG BRADLEY RETURNS TO VOICE THE ICONIC PINHEAD (ABOVE).

he says that the game foregrounds the Female Cenobite, whose emphasis Bradley points out once again leverages Barker's historic influence ("she is very much the driving force in *The Hellbound Heart*," says the actor). "She represents the voice of temptation in our game, who lures and reassures rather than commands," explains Esov. "She is integral to the story and the overall arc of the main protagonist, Aidan Lynch."

The director indicated that one of his biggest challenges was integrating her as a formidable force in Pinhead's orbit. "He is a character of strong gravitas and presence," Esov admits. "I think that we managed to give her and the other Cenobites something distinct so they are not all perceived just as Pinhead's henchmen."

Beyond the Cenobites, Esov and Saber Interactive focused on translating key visual iconography from the franchise into new or slightly different forms that best fit the game. "For example, instead of directly using the Lament Configuration, we designed our own puzzle device, the Genesis Configuration, which serves similar narrative function while giving us creative flexibility," Esov says. Even so, he assures fans that they'll recognize a broad panorama of elements within the game: "Some other key visual aspects include Leviathan, the Labyrinth, chains, hooks and the ever-present combination of flesh and metal."

As in past *Hellraiser* mythology, flesh and metal combine violently in *Revival*. Esov says that he and his collaborators split the difference between the extremes of pain and pleasure when determining the game's intensity. "In order to make a decision about scary [versus] sexy, we had to answer a question ourselves: What common feeling do people experience when looking at something sexy or scary?" he recalls. "Once we decided our answer to that question is 'discomfort,' we tried to design a game about exploring those levels.

"Sometimes it will be about visceral imagery, and other times about sensuality and arousal," he continues. "It is not about tension or jump-scares, but about slow-cooking discomfort and a lingering sense of unease that does not resolve, even after the moment has passed."

Upon release, Saber will offer players two versions of the game: a mature edition featuring unabridged gore and violence, and one that's more visually inhibited. "Our goal was to push the boundaries as far as we could, but not so far that it strays away from Clive Barker's vision," he insists. While the intention was to deliver an experience accessible to fans of all (well, most) ages, Esov says that he and his team went for broke during the development process and only later began to restrain themselves in order to consider players who might not quite be old enough to, ahem, see all of the sights there are to show them. "We did not think about age ratings and SFW boundaries for a really long time," he says.

"We focused 100% on delivering an experience that we think truly does justice to *Hellraiser* — we made zero compromises along the way, and were even encouraged by Clive Barker and his team to do exactly that," Esov reveals. "This unlocked us creatively, and we designed the game that should be playable by all horror fans, but with true *Hellraiser* fans in mind. We did not have to censor anything so far and still got an M rating, which was our goal."

Set for release later this year, *Hellraiser: Revival* allows players to at long last cross from observation of the twisted Hell-world of Barker's imagination into participation. "In the films or novellas, you are always outside looking in," Esov says. "You witness the Cenobites, the Box, and the consequences, but you never truly have agency. A game changes that relationship and it lets players enter the space as active participants."

At the same time, its director says the game offers an experience beyond limits — pain and pleasure, indivisible — whether you fully want to go to Hell, or just stop by for a visit. "Our game has an original, standalone story that can be enjoyed even if you are not a longtime *Hellraiser* fan," Esov says. "The main focus with *Revival* was to create a true and uncompromising *Hellraiser* experience that can stand shoulder to shoulder with the best of Clive Barker's works."

PHOTOS BY COURTESY OF SABER INTERACTIVE INC.

IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT THE CENOBITES KNOW HOW TO PARTY. JUST DON'T LET THEM DO IT AT *YOUR* HOUSE.

BIRTHING A NEW SLASHER

FILMMAKING DUO SPIDER ONE AND KRSY FOX ANNOUNCE THE ARRIVAL OF THEIR BIG BABY.

BY ANGEL MELANSON

Indie filmmaking duo Spider One and Krsy Fox have built something of a modern-day horror film troupe. Since 2021, they've released six features (two executive-produced by Cher!) through their joint venture, OneFox Productions. Genre fans will recognize familiar faces, including Bonnie Aarons, Barbara Crampton, and Heather Langenkamp in their previous film, *Little Bites*. This time, they're tackling a slasher through a psychological horror lens, centered on the power of the creative process. *Big Baby* follows a screenwriter (*Dead To Me*'s Brandon Scott) on the brink. As he tries to bring a nightmare about a masked killer to life, the lines between reality and fiction begin to blur.

Krsy and Spider talked to FANGORIA about their process, their inspirations, and what's next for the filmmaking duo.

ADAM (BRANDON SCOTT) HAS A LITTLE TROUBLE IN *BIG BABY*.

Spider, much like your protagonist Adam, you listen to podcasts, read reviews, and online comments. When creating a character like this, how much reality do you blend with the fiction, and how accurate is it to say that Adam is an avatar of yourself?

Spider One: Oh, 100% accurate, it was no secret. I didn't realize how obvious it was. We were talking to Brandon Scott about a scene, and I said, 'You're basically playing me,' and he goes, 'Oh, I know.' That element of the story was inspired by my insanity, torturing myself, reading every single thing I could find on my movies, good and bad.

The major difference is that I don't get really upset by it. If you make something and you personally feel really good about it, and you've done the absolute best you can, you become a little bit bulletproof to criticism. I think the only criticism that hurts is when you agree with it, and you're like, 'Yeah, shit, they were right about that.'

You're not just filmmaking partners; you're a real-life couple, with a family and a life together. Do you ever pull bits from your actual conversations and put them in the movie?

SO: There's definitely some stuff that comes out of our real life. Adam's character really wants recognition from critics, but what he wants more than anything is recognition from Kate, his girlfriend. That probably rings true about our relationship. If I write the script, the most important thing is that Krsy likes it. I feel like we're trying to please each other more than maybe anybody else. That is the fundamental thing that I wrote into that character. It just means so much to him, to the point where he gets really upset if she even has the smallest of notes, because he just wants to have her adoration, support, and belief in his work.

Krsy Fox: People ask us all the time about working together. It is a matter of respect, and we very much share the same goal. Even if we have different thoughts on some creative things, we talk about that during pre-production, but it's this mutual respect that we need and get from each other. We don't ever have any shit on set. We don't fight. It's one goal, one team.

BTS PHOTOS BY MATTHEW HERSH • STILLS BY ANDY PATCH

BIG BABY (ADAM MARCINOWSKI) GIVES STUNT PERFORMER MONETTE MOIO A LIFT.

KATE (KRSY FOX) IS GIVING FINAL GIRL ENERGY, BUT THAT'S NOT A SPOILER AS FAR AS I KNOW.

AMANDA (CATHERINE CORCORAN) IS GONNA NEED SOME STITCHES AFTER THIS.

"YOU HAVE THIS MOMENT WHERE YOU'RE LIKE, 'WHAT IS FUCKING WRONG WITH US? WHAT ARE WE DOING? WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE ARE WE?'"

- SPIDER ONE -

IT TAKES A VILLAGE, OR AT LEAST THESE THREE, TO RAISE A BIG BABY: FX ARTISTS SALINA WARD AND RYAN WARD HELP MARCINOWSKI GET INTO CHARACTER.

We're not perfect, of course, but you're progressing and trying to get everything done.

You work very quickly, but you're also very big on practical effects, and those two things don't always go hand in hand. Can you talk a little bit about the practical effects and your team?

KF: We worked with Ryan and Salina Ward from Little Shop of Gore; they're amazing. Also, Ashley Stansbury, who we've worked with on several movies. I've learned it's about assembling a perfect team based on the needs of that movie. I had just worked with Ryan on *Terrifier 3*, he was tubing all the bodies, he was the blood guy. We needed the blood guy for this. I feel like we assembled this little dream team.

SO: What we've learned with each progressive movie is that when you have an effects day, make it just an effects day. Inevitably, no matter how talented your team is, or how well prepared you are, at least 10 times a night, you're going to hear, 'The blood's not working.' You get everything perfect, the blocking's right, the ax hits, and there's no blood. You learn that the special effects gods never want to cooperate with your schedule.

Some of the most fun moments on set are when you're chopping someone's head off. We were shooting the Catherine Corcoran scene, chopping limbs off, and there were just gallons of blood pouring onto the street. You have this moment where you're like, 'What is fucking wrong with us? What are we doing? What kind of people are we?'

KF: There was another day we were shooting in this church parking lot, and the blood canister went off and just covered Spider in blood.

This is not the first appearance of Big Baby on screen. What was the inception of this character?

SO: I distinctly remember, in the very early days of Monsterpalooza, somebody selling adult crying-baby masks. You see it all over the place now, but at the time, I was like, 'That is the most horrifying thing I've ever seen.' It always stuck with me.

A segment in our film *Allegoria* featured a much goofier version of Big Baby. A lot of people who saw it said, 'That's our favorite part, please make a Big Baby movie.' So maybe there's a reason why I read all those comments; it led me to actually make the real Big Baby movie.

KF: It was literally for the fans who saw it. I think Spider did a good job of doing a slasher in a way that still feels like him and his movies. It still has the essence of the gore and the fun of Big Baby, but it also feels like him.

SO: I didn't really have a deep passion for making a traditional slasher, what I call the four kids in the woods, getting chased. I wanted to figure out a weird reverse-engineering approach to reap the benefits of having the crazy character and the guy in the mask doing crazy stuff, but in a way I hope is unique, original, and compelling.

Spider, you're on tour right now with your band Powerman 5000, but you two are never not making a movie. What can you tell us about what's coming down the pipeline?

SO: We've got a couple of things brewing. You never know what the next thing will be, because sometimes you have a plan and it changes. People have always been curious why I've never made a music-centric horror movie. I never quite figured out how to do it, but I think I finally have. I won't give too much away, but it is centered on a struggling 1980s hardcore band on tour. They get themselves into a whole lot of shit.

I'm hoping that's the next one; I think it would be really fun. I grew up in that '80s hardcore scene back in Boston and spent my teen years in the clubs watching SS Decontrol and all the DC hardcore bands, Government Issue, the Minutemen, and Black Flag. That was my life as a kid. There was such a punk ethos that you believed in that I think has carried over to how we make these movies. I'm very excited to see if I can pull off a really authentic 1980s punk rock movie.

This conversation was edited for length and clarity.

A FUN THING TO DO IS READ SPIDER ONE'S PULL QUOTE ON THE PRECEDING PAGE AND IMAGINE THAT'S WHAT HE'S SAYING TO FOX HERE.

ADAM LEARNS WHAT COMEDIAN PAUL MOONEY ONCE RANDOMLY SAID TO ME IN AN INTERVIEW: "IF A BABY WAS 200 POUNDS IT WOULD KILL YOU. A BABY WANTS WHAT IT WANTS AND IT WILL FUCK YOU UP."

FEEL THE EVIL DEAD BURN

'THE FRANCHISE KEEPS ON POSSESSIN', THIS TIME WITH SÉBASTIEN VANIČEK (*INFESTED*) AT THE HELM.

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

Among the many ways director Sébastien Vaniček sought to make *Evil Dead Burn* his own original contribution to the long-running film franchise, he addressed a nagging plausibility issue that has cropped up not only in the past entries, but throughout horror history. "I really wanted the audience to connect with my characters," he says, "and I think if you found a book full of ancient incantations, you wouldn't read them out loud. We've seen, like, five movies where there's someone saying things you shouldn't say, and I wanted to do something fresh. What I did with the Book of the Dead is pretty different from the other films."

So the process of unleashing the eons-old dark forces is different in *Evil Dead Burn* (opening July 10 from New Line/Warner Bros.), though the upshot follows in the ferocious tradition of the previous entries. Alice (Souheila Yacoub) has lost her husband, and following his funeral, she arrives at his family house to say her last goodbyes to her in-laws. Things go badly from there.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES

HEY, *YOU* TELL THYA (LUCIANE BUCHANAN)
THAT'S NOT HOW YOU USE A HEADREST.

"IT'S BASICALLY AN AUTEUR FILM, WHILE STAYING ENTERTAINING AND AN EVIL DEAD MOVIE."

- SÉBASTIEN VANIČEK -

The situation is already tense before the Book begins transforming this brood into Deadites, as Rob Tapert, who produced *Burn* with fellow *Evil Dead* creator Sam Raimi, explains. "This is the story of a woman who was in a marriage where she was the outsider, and the family was not supportive of that marriage," he says. "Now that her husband has passed, their expectations of what she does now are in conflict with her own desires. And that helps set up the tension within the family."

Those relatable emotions amidst the extreme mayhem were at the heart of Vaniček's ambitions for *Burn*, after the *Evil Dead* brain trust approached him to join the franchise. Like many in the horror scene, they had been impressed by the French filmmaker's 2023 film *Infested*, in which a group of friends, family and partners confront a killer spider invasion of their apartment building. Vaniček aimed for a similar dramatic focus for his trip into Deadite territory.

"They basically gave me carte blanche," he recalls, "like, 'Just write your own story in our universe.' So I had meetings with my co-writer, Florent Bernard, and we talked about *Evil Dead*, and we watched Raimi's movies again and again. We came to understand that they were all about, of course, death, but also a lot about love. These are stories about relationships and friendships, and he's asking the audience, 'Would you be ready to kill the people you love?'"

This idea carries on from Fede Álvarez's 2013 *Evil Dead* remake and Lee Cronin's 2023 *Evil Dead Rise* as well, and after the switch to an urban locale in the latter, we're back amidst the trees in *Burn*. Tapert nonetheless notes that the setting is a little different from those seen in earlier *Evil Deads*. "It has elements of a cabin in the woods, but it's really not. Is it an isolated location? Yes — that's a key to horror. But this is a family home, and the action and the drama are so different from any of the other ones that I don't think it will invite comparisons to the other movies based on its geography.

"This movie holds its own place in the *Evil Dead* universe," Tapert continues. "It's a very different treatment of the lore. It expands it, and takes it in a slightly new direction. One of the things that Sébastien and Florent have done is fill in a bit of the Book's backstory. It has a touchstone to *Evil Dead Rise*, but then goes on its own path, and fills in some of the

history of the franchise mythology — where the Book came from, who was involved in it. I'm hoping that the fans will find that enticing, because it's the beginning of a road that leads… somewhere. I'll say that."

Vaniček reveals that he illustrated the *Burn* book himself, and that he knew early on who he wanted to play his beleaguered heroine. "Souheila Yacoub was at the center of my mind the whole time," he says. "I've seen her on stage — she's a theater actress first — and she's really, really physical. She was one of the only French actresses I wanted to talk to, and I met her in Paris a month before I left for New Zealand [where *Burn* was shot]. I told her about the story and the complexity of Alice and the layers of statement I hid in the story. Like, it's basically an auteur film, while staying entertaining and an *Evil Dead* movie."

The rest of the ensemble, which also includes Tandi Wright, Hunter Doohan, Luciane Buchanan, Errol Shand, Maude Davey, George Pullar and Greta Van Den Brink, is a mix of American, New Zealand and Australian actors. They were selected via the usual casting process, though Vaniček notes, "They had to provide me with a human

ALICE (SOUHEILA YACOUB) IS NOT IN WONDERLAND, BUT RATHER IN A HOUSE FULL OF DEADITES.

GRETA VAN DEN BRINK LETS HER DEADITE FLAG FLY.

self-tape, and a Deadite one. That was the funniest and the strangest thing to do, but it worked out very well."

Another constant with the *Evil Dead* films has been the grueling workouts the productions put their actors through. That didn't change with *Burn*. "I told Souheila right away that it would probably be the most physical movie of her career," Vaniček says. "I don't know how you can do a more physical film than *Evil Dead*. And it was the same for all of the actors. I let them know, at some point they would be really tired. They would be exhausted from the shoot and they would be covered in blood, and they would have to crawl and fight, they would have to wear harnesses. Most of them did their own stunts, or at least some of them.

"I told them, 'If you agree to do this movie with me, you have to understand that we will be in the same boat. I won't be hiding in a tent, I will be with you on set holding the camera, and we'll crawl together. We'll be in the cold together. We'll do all these things together.' I'm lucky to have played rugby for about 25 years, so I'm used to this kind of brotherhood, where you are together in the mud, in the cold, in the rain, and you have to fight for something. That's how I make my movies; it's like, 'We are all together in the shit, and we have to fight to do the best movie possible.' And they jumped right in with me."

Another crucial part of the team, of course, were the makeup effects artists who turned the performers into Deadites and created their carnage. "On *Evil Dead Burn*, we had an entirely different makeup group from *Evil Dead Rise*," Tapert says. "We went back to Jane O'Kane, who did *Evil Dead* 2013 and *Ash vs. Evil Dead*, and just wasn't available for *Rise*. Not that I had any problems with what Luke [Polti] and his people did on that film, but I love Jane. I've worked with her, I hate to say it, for over 30 years. She goes back to the *Hercules* days with me."

With Vaniček's specific approach to the story came a fresh approach to the Deadites. Each new *Evil Dead* film has presented a distinct variation on how the possessions physically affect their victims, and the *Burn* director's approach was motivated, once again, by character. Rather than go for a completely different look, the devil was in the details for him.

"I started with the eyes, because that's important in an *Evil Dead* film," Vaniček explains. "Ours has a lot of Deadites, so each one has their own eyes, and their own personality. I didn't want all of them to be the same, because the interesting thing about the Deadites is that they're really smart. They play with the characters, what's happening in their heads and with their bodies. So I wanted all of them to behave differently when they are possessed.

"It was also a question of stunts. The actors had a lot of rehearsals for how their bodies would move and how they would fight when they're possessed. For example, a 50-year-old father wouldn't behave the same way as a 25-year-old girl. The body movements were a big thing for me."

A big thing throughout *Evil Dead* history has been the level of onscreen gore, which led the first two films to be released unrated; the two most recent installments got away with a hell of a lot of bloodshed while still bearing R ratings. So it's no surprise that Vaniček was under no restrictions when it came to slinging the splatter.

"I was allowed to do whatever I had in mind," he says. "I went really, really far. Then we discovered the MPA, and they, naturally, told me that I had some scenes that were too violent and brutal. We got an NC-17, and we couldn't allow the movie to have that rating; we needed the R. So I cut certain scenes and toned down parts of the film. I'm sure the audience would have liked to see them, and maybe one day we'll release a director's cut on video, but right now, it's a theatrical release, so I had to remove some things. But it's still right at the edge between R-rated and NC-17."

"I had identified for Sébastien what some of the key issues were going to be — and they have been," Tapert adds. "But *Burn* will still feel like an *Evil Dead* movie. I'm not even certain what's being removed will be enough to warrant an unrated cut. It's a different kind of *Evil Dead* film, and equally hard-hitting in another fashion."

Part of that impact has to do with a key element that has been added to the mix: fire, as the title suggests. Vaniček says the staging of the burns was "pretty dangerous, but we had

WHO AMONG US *HASN'T* SLAMMED OFF A FINGER OR FOUR IN A CAR DOOR, AMIRITE?

an amazing stunt crew. They are really, really good with fire, and we had a lot of rehearsals. And, yeah, the fire you will see in the movie is real. We lit the scenes with actual fire. Certainly, we needed some CGI, when it's really, really big, but that was just enhancements."

Fire is part of the movie's metaphorical statement as well. "It's about the fire that burns inside you that can make you move mountains," Vaniček explains, "but can also destroy you when you are deeply in love with someone, whether it's your son, your daughter, your husband, your wife, or just your girlfriend. There's this fire that lives inside you, but at some point, it can also burn you like family can burn you, like marriage can burn you."

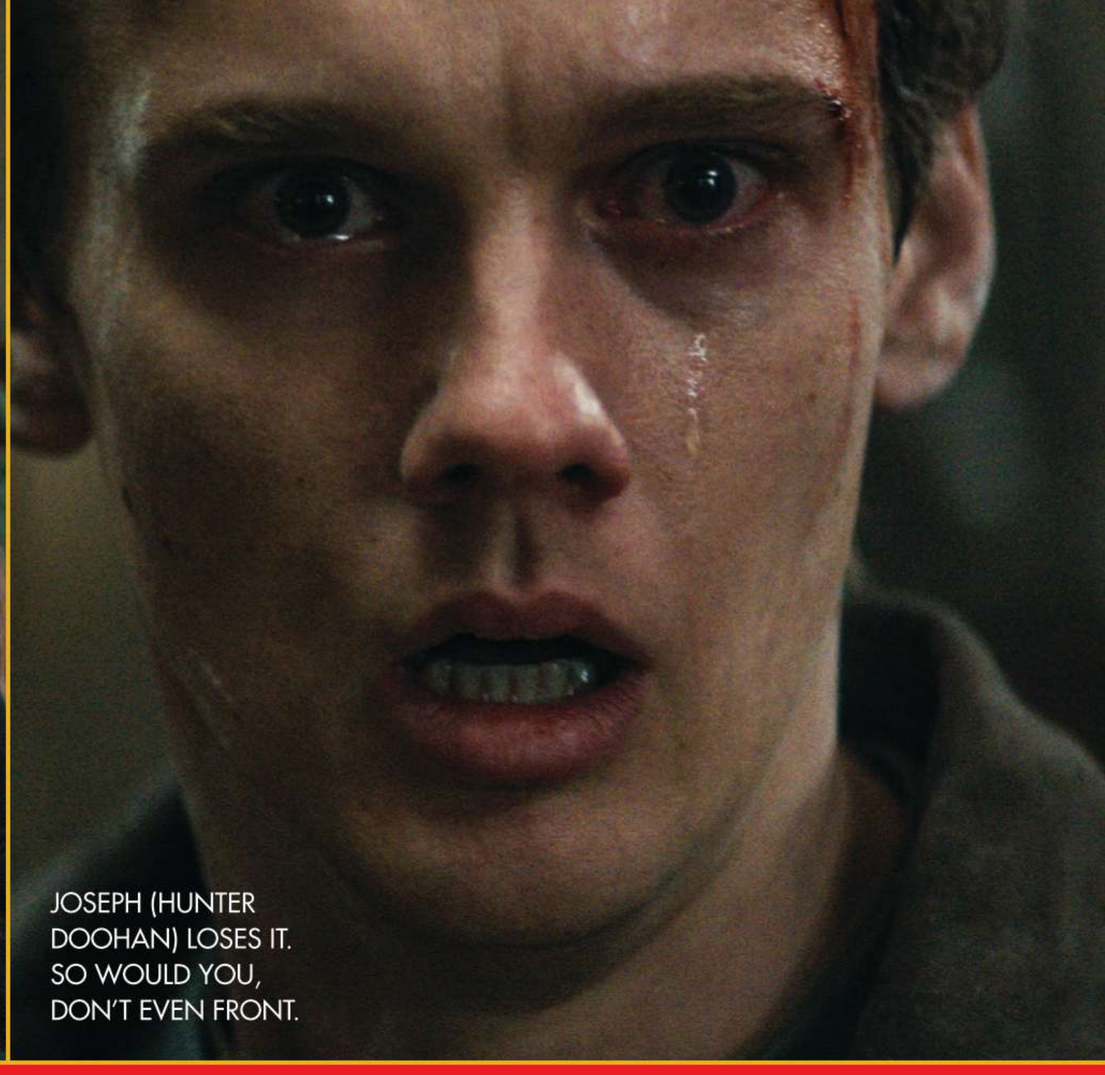
On the other hand, the director has nothing but positive things to say about his relationship with the *Evil Dead* "family" who welcomed him into their fold. During the shoot, "Rob was always there; he was very present, and Sam was there during prep and post. They were both there to help me achieve my vision. I had the freedom I wanted, but they were also around when I needed them. Sometimes they would just remind me what the *Evil Dead* franchise is about, just to make sure I kept that in mind. They're protective of their baby, and wanted to make sure that when I was putting my hands on their child, I was doing good work. But they also knew that if I was going to do good work, I needed my space. So it was about finding the right balance, and they definitely did."

It has been more than a decade now that Raimi and Tapert, along with Bruce Campbell, have been nurturing up-and-coming filmmakers via the *Evil Dead* series, plucking them from the independent and international film scenes and giving them a shot at a high-profile theatrical showcase. Following Álvarez, Cronin, and Vaniček, the producers next tapped Francis Galluppi, who broke out with the much-praised neo-Western crime thriller *The Last Stop in Yuma County* (2023), to take the reins of *Evil Dead Wrath*. That movie rolled in February of this year, just four months after *Burn* wrapped, though it's currently not set for release until April 7, 2028.

"We had an opportunity to get a commitment to do two movies in the *Evil Dead* franchise," Tapert reveals, "even though we knew that *Wrath* wouldn't come out for some time, nor should it. There are lessons to be learned from what happened with *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple*, that there should be a long enough pause so that the market feels it's fresh again. From just an efficiency point of view, however, and wanting to work with Francis, who was an in-demand director, going sooner rather than later allowed for a lot of synergies and to keep Francis in place and not have him poached by somebody else.

"He was 100 percent the right person to tell an incredibly unique story in the *Evil Dead* universe," Tapert continues. "*Wrath* is a period piece that takes place in the early

SÉBASTIEN VANIČEK AND YACOUB MAP OUT A TRIP TO HELL.



JOSEPH (HUNTER DOOHAN) LOSES IT. SO WOULD YOU, DON'T EVEN FRONT.

'70s, so it predates the original *Evil Dead*. It will, in its own way, circle back on the franchise. So I thought, 'Well, I'll just do two solid years of work, and then I can coast for a year or two.' [*Laughs*] After *Evil Dead Burn* opens, I think things will calm down for a moment."

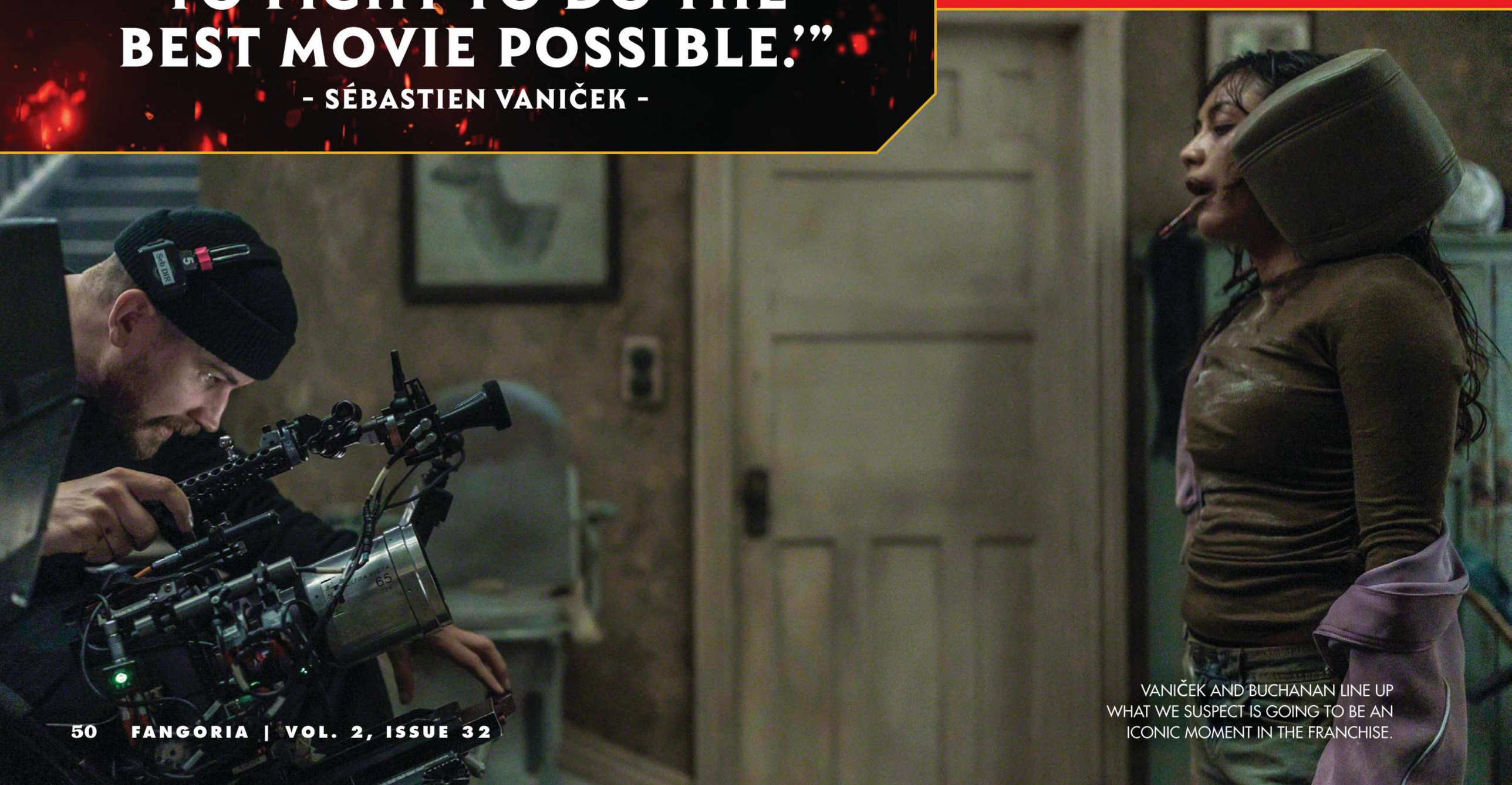
Vaniček says that he had a chance to meet up with Galluppi to discuss their *Evil Dead* entries — and possible connections between them. "Sam and Rob want this universe to feel real, like it actually exists, so Francis and I had to find some links. Not to just make one a spinoff of the other, but without spoiling anything, you will see some things in my movie that you will understand later."

For now, Vaniček, who is developing new projects as a director and may executive-produce an American remake of *Infested*, is looking forward to unleashing *Evil Dead Burn* on audiences. "I love the *Evil Dead* movies, and I wanted to respect the fans," he says. "But I also wanted to break some of the clichés. I wanted to step away from conventions and what the audience is expecting. I wanted to make this movie an experience — something people will feel in their bodies, something that is visceral. And I made sure that it's very well situated within the *Evil Dead* universe. It's definitely the best *Evil Dead* movie I could do. I put everything into it. So I hope the fans like it." 💀

PHOTOS TOP LEFT AND BOTTOM BY MATT KLITSCHER

"THAT'S HOW I MAKE MY MOVIES; IT'S LIKE, 'WE ARE ALL TOGETHER IN THE SHIT, AND WE HAVE TO FIGHT TO DO THE BEST MOVIE POSSIBLE.'"

- SÉBASTIEN VANIČEK -



VANIČEK AND BUCHANAN LINE UP WHAT WE SUSPECT IS GOING TO BE AN ICONIC MOMENT IN THE FRANCHISE.

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I Scream, You Scream

ELI ROTH ASSURES US THAT WE'LL ALL SCREAM FOR *Ice Cream Man*

BY TODD GILCHRIST

As small-town values continue to disintegrate with the dismantling of one American institution after another, a bond that remains among the most sacred is the one between children and the individual handing out scoops of ice cream from a vehicle playing "Turkey in the Straw." In *Ice Cream Man*, Eli Roth takes aim at this beloved suburban fixture with the story of a cone vendor whose frozen desserts unlock homicidal impulses in the pre-teens who eat them. The project marks the co-writer and director's tenth film, but Roth says it's an idea that's been churning since the earliest days of his career.

"I came up with this idea after *Cabin Fever*," Roth tells FANGORIA. "This is a film I was going to do before *Hostel*, and I just couldn't pull it together. It was too complex filming with all those kids and doing the effects, and I just didn't have the filmmaking experience to really pull it off."

From a pre-teen martial artist screaming "PANCAKES!" before biting into a college student's hand in *Cabin Fever* to a gang of Romani street urchins playing football with a severed head in *Hostel: Part II*, Roth has always demonstrated an affinity for combining childish humor with grown-up gore. The filmmaker

THE TREATS OF THE ICE CREAM MAN (ARI MILLEN) ARE GIVING THE COMMUNITY MORE THAN CAVITIES (BELOW).

PRINCIPAL MALONEY (DARRIN BAKER) LEARNS THAT ONCE YOU LOSE THE RESPECT OF THE CLASSROOM, IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE KIDS MURDER YOU.

comes by the impulse honestly. "In seventh grade, someone remembered me coming in with a fake hand into art class and putting it on the paper cutter and looking at the teacher and fully chopping my hand off," he remembers. Yet as eager as he was as a kid to traumatize the adults in his orbit, Roth was himself disturbed by films that leveraged the innocence of children to exact violence upon their families and communities.

"I remember seeing the movie *The Children* from 1980, where these kids in a school bus drive through an infected cloud of gas," Roth recalls. "That image of the kids killing adults really scared me… I always wanted to do something like that."

From 1980 to his 2002 directorial debut to now, Roth has matured as a filmmaker, but he's also faced real-world experiences that lent gravitas to a script originally conceived to deliver mischievous gore. "Having kids now, that's why I wanted to revisit it," he says. "I was thinking, this is the moment where you look at what is being put into our food? What's in the soil? What's in the water? The disturbing part is that you can't control everything that gets into your child's head."

Aiming to create a film that echoed the medieval legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin — where the namesake musician steals a town's children to exact revenge on their parents — the inveterate cinephile layered in the inspirations of everything from Amblin-esque coming-of-age films to Hitchcock classics, with plenty of grindhouse-style fare providing the same kind of connective tissue it did in much of his earlier work.

"It's like *The Birds* but with kids, or *Saving Private Ryan*," he says. "*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is in

"Kids killing adults really scared me… I always wanted to do something like that."

– ELI ROTH

THAT AIN'T DIABETES: PIPER (CHARLIE STOREY) COMES BACK DIFFERENT AFTER A TRIP TO THE ICE CREAM MAN'S TRUCK.

there for sure, with Donald Sutherland, and also *Bad News Bears*. And movies like *The Children* or *Devil Times Five* or *Bloody Birthday* or *The Bad Seed* — kids doing the unthinkable. But you don't want to cut away — you want to see them do it."

As permissive as the Motion Picture Association's ratings may have become with regard to adult violence, kid-oriented stuff (even when they're the perpetrator) is mostly either reduced to *Home Alone*-style slapstick or depicted off screen. Consequently, Roth indicates he knew early in the development process that the only way *Ice Cream Man* would work was if it were released without a rating. "You can't do a movie like this and have it be R-rated because part of the fun is seeing the children do these things that are completely insane," he says. Although releasing a film without the MPA's validation used to severely limit its options for distribution (much less commercial potential), Roth says he was emboldened by the success of a recent independently-released franchise to not only go for broke with the gore, but distribute it himself through his crowd-sourced studio, The Horror Section.

"*Terrifier* really broke the doors open in terms of what an unrated movie can do in theaters," he observes. "Full credit to those guys, that movie showed that the audience is there — and that for the first time ever, theater chains were willing to give you a wide release unrated."

As a filmmaker whose creativity is often fueled by transgressing boundaries — of intensity, of bloodshed, and sometimes good taste — Roth thrilled at the chance to let his imagination run wild. "There's always that moment when I'm making a film where someone at some point says, 'You can't do that.' I didn't want to be told, 'You can't have a kid chopping their parents' head off — that's too distasteful'," he says.

So what can moviegoers look forward to? Among many other gag-inducing moments, a scene at an elementary school where students amputate a teacher's hand with a paper cutter — and then play tag with it. Another where a father awakens to discover his 10-year-old daughter removing his wife's head with a tree saw, before their son bounces a Louisville Slugger off his forehead. A little girl making a snow angel in a pool of her principal's blood. Kids using entrails to play double dutch. And countless adult body parts that are impaled, excavated or bashed in with various instruments synonymous with childhood fun.

Roth admits that working with a cast mostly comprised of kids presented him with some challenges that even decades of in-the-trenches filmmaking hadn't taught him to anticipate. "We were about to shoot the carnage at the playground where the kids are trying to escape, and it's 100 extras," he explains. "We roll camera and the kids aren't moving. Some kid has his hand up: 'My shoe's untied.'" In another case, his cast dispersed because of the appearance of a bee. Yet more than an opportunity to indulge his most unrestrained instincts, Roth says that it's a film that his life and career has readied him to make. "You just need those 10,000 hours of experience to know how to work with kids and move that fast and be that prepared and be able to adapt."

As open-ended as is the note on which the film concludes, Roth insists he's not yet ready to test the theory that too much *Ice Cream* can be a bad thing; "if people like it, it's a story I'd love to continue, but you never plan for a trilogy," he says. Until then, however, Roth says he's more than content to take aim at the sacred cows of our culture and use their milk to serve viewers a cinematic treat that's as delicious as it is devilish. "The ice cream just becomes a metaphor for the way we blindly trust what's in a package because someone told us it's safe to eat, but the fun is that the kids are committing these horrific acts," Roth observes.

"You can say that it's funny, and on the surface it is. But what's scary is that no matter what you do, there are forces out there that want to pollute your child's mind and potentially turn them against you." 💀

A RABID CHILD PUTS A MOUSETRAP ON AN ADULT'S FOOT, AND ELI ROTH COULDN'T BE HAPPIER ABOUT IT.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE HORROR SECTION

DEMONIZING UNDER

An Australian filmmaker's debut feature gives flesh to a real-world evil in LEVITICUS.

BY ISAAC FELDBERG

What starts as a delicate, romantic story of two teenagers navigating a mutual crush becomes something far more viscerally disturbing in Adrian Chiarella's *Leviticus*.

Working within a long lineage of horror cinema in which sexual desire makes us vulnerable, even as it sharpens the queer subtext of such stories — that being your truest self could prove deadly — with aching specificity, this Sundance breakout feature follows Naim and Ryan (Joe Bird and Stacy Clausen), two young men in a small Australian town who are haunted by a supernatural entity after their parents force them through an exorcism intended to extinguish their urges. Instead, the ritual brings forth a demon that appears to them in the form of the ones they desire most — including each other — only to violently attack when their defenses are down.

"I grew up during a time when the rights of the LGBTQ+ community were steadily improving, but, over the last decade or so, I've felt that progress beginning to recede," Chiarella tells FANGORIA. "There seemed to be a growing wave of homophobia, and the rhetoric in our political and public spheres was becoming noticeably darker. I wanted to make a film that explored what homophobia really is. At its core, it is a form of fear. Horror felt like the natural genre to express that, and it allowed me to tap into one of the genres I've always loved most."

Early in the writing process, the filmmaker found himself researching the ways conversion therapy has been used in various cultures, and he was especially struck by coming across news stories of teenagers being subjected to exorcisms by church leaders attempting to cast out homosexual demons. "I originally thought the film could be a gay reimagining of *The Exorcist*, but every way I tried to tackle that idea only seemed to reinforce the idea behind conversion therapy: that there is a gay demon," he explains. "I started thinking, 'Well, what is the opposite of that?' Eventually, I landed on this idea that it's a monster that takes the form of the person you desire most, like this manifestation of your desires coming back to kill you."

TALK TO ME'S JOE BIRD TAKES THE LEAD IN *LEVITICUS* AS NAIM, WHOSE FEELINGS FOR RYAN (STACY CLAUSEN, PRECEDING PAGE) COME UNDER ATTACK BY FORCES WITHIN HIS COMMUNITY… AND BEYOND.

"We have this great tradition in Australia of telling stories about characters lost in these terrifying landscapes that goes way, way back to classic gothic films like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*."

- Adrian Chiarella

Named for the Book of the Old Testament often used to justify homophobia, Chiarella's debut feature is set against the isolating backdrop of a repressive Christian fundamentalist community in backcountry Australia. The film's atmosphere unsettles even before its entity appears, in its evocation of a religious environment that strands its protagonists — both still in the process of sorting through their intense feelings for one another — with no one else to turn to.

Casting was crucial, and Chiarella strove for authenticity in finding young actors. He'd seen *Talk to Me* but hadn't considered Bird — who was age 14 when he played the possessed Riley in Danny and Michael Philippou's horror feature — until he watched his audition tape. Clausen, meanwhile, came to Chiarella's attention after reaching out to production company Causeway Films, which launched twelve years ago with Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook* and has since steered a new movement of Australian horror including not only the Philippous' films but work by Goran Stolevski (*You Won't Be Alone*) and Samuel Van Grinsven (*Went Up the Hill*). Though Clausen lost out on a role in *Bring Her Back*, he had "an incredible dexterity," per Chiarella, that made him perfect for the complexity of a character like Ryan.

"There's so much going on with these boys internally — fear, shame, religious guilt — and it all just allows these characters to become unpredictable," Bird says. "You don't know what's going to happen, and neither do they; they're

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NEON

NAIM AND RYAN'S COMMUNITY MIGHT DISCRIMINATE, BUT THE RELENTLESS ENTITY IN *LEVITICUS* SURE DOESN'T, AS MARNIE (TYALLAH BULLOCK) DISCOVERS.

like these boiling kettles, in a way. The scariest part is how easy it is for these characters to deny something that they feel so completely and so strongly, to still convince themselves it isn't there. That's more unsettling than anything supernatural."

After the boys both end up before a deliverance healer (Aussie veteran Nicholas Hope, of *Bad Boy Bubby* fame) — along with the pastor's son, Hunter (Jeremy Blewitt), who's separately entangled with Ryan — they find themselves ostracized at school and even more alone at home. Naim's mother (Mia Wasikowska), who ordered the ritual performed on him, says she's well aware of its consequences. "We need fear to survive," she tells her horrified son.

"We have this great tradition in Australia of telling stories about characters lost in these terrifying landscapes that goes way, way back to classic gothic films like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*," says Chiarella. "In the last decade, Australian horror filmmakers have really embraced that physical landscape but also internalized it and started to explore more contemporary social issues, whether around motherhood, teen addiction, or homophobia, using the same palette of that landscape to explore these internalized traumas."

Death at the hands of the entity starts with a seduction and ends in a merciless beating; for the queer community Chiarella always had in mind when making *Leviticus*, the fear of such forceful punishment for acting on one's desire is rooted in an all-too-real awareness of homophobia and its horrors. As Naim and Ryan grow aware of an evil presence only they can see, *Leviticus* mines dread from the daily bigotry its characters endure. In one scene, a dead frog is thrown at Ryan in science class, its guts splattering one side of his face. In another, Hunter's sister (Davida McKenzie) promises she can help them reverse the curse and drives the boys to an abandoned lot, where a group of older teenagers wait to jump them.

"That scene was hard for me as a filmmaker, because it's the only moment in the film where we see actual homophobia dramatized," says Chiarella. "The rest of the movie is a trick where I get to work within this metaphor for what I want to explore, but I knew at some point we had to show real homophobia. That was difficult for me, both emotionally and creatively."

With *Leviticus* told primarily from Naim's perspective, Clausen had the challenge of playing both Ryan and the entity assuming his appearance. "As the story progresses, the monster gets better and better at mimicking Ryan," the actor says. "In the beginning, it felt more conscious, all these microexpressions I was changing within my face; but as we got toward the end, I was almost just playing Ryan with the slightest withholding of emotion."

In one scene at a skating rink, Ryan is lured into a photo booth by the entity, posing as Naim, which starts to strangle him. "Somewhere, there's a great clip of me in that photo booth," Clausen recalls. "Adrian's like, 'More suffocation, more suffocation. Straighten your neck!' And I pass out for half a second, then I come back up. I was pushing my body as hard as I could to make it look as authentic as possible.

"Switching between those moments of close, quiet intimacy and those

moments of heightened, crazed fear, I wouldn't call that a delicate process," he adds. "You just have to throw yourself, or allow yourself to be thrown, to the greatest of heights, and not be scared to absolutely go for it."

The trickiest scene for all involved featured a climactic confrontation between Naim and the entity, which appears one night unannounced at his doorstep. Longing for one another, the two boys press their foreheads and hands together through a mesh screen door; but when the entity reveals itself, eyes suddenly glowing yellow in the dark, this encounter turns violent and spills through Naim's house, then into the bathroom, where all sorts of sexually charged imagery — in particular some involving a fist — is directed to diabolical ends. Scissors are deployed to flesh-rending effect; at one point, the entity in the form of Ryan pushes his arm deeper and deeper down Naim's throat.

"There were three different prosthetic arms made, and they'd switch them in and out," Bird recalls. "The makeup assistant was holding one end of the longest one, and I'd have to fold it up like a burger, then try to fit it into my mouth, with Stacy's fingers in there as well. I'd be actually gagging, and Adrian would be like, 'That's great! Keep gagging, keep choking!'"

"I got to be an animal in that scene, doing anything I wanted," says Clausen. "You can see me drooling; it's coming off my chin, and it's in some way incredibly liberating to just not have any rules about, to not have to be a person for a night." The color contacts required a different kind of commitment.

"If you're talking technically, those things *hurt*, man," says Clausen. "Normally, when an actor wears contact lenses, it's to change the color of their irises, but those ones changed the color of the whites of my eyes, so they were massive and painful. They ended up numbing my eyes with anesthetic, because I just couldn't handle it. But when you're playing this monstrous being that's an externalization of fear and pain, to be constantly uncomfortable — and to look in the mirror and see that you don't look like yourself — does play into your ability to step out of yourself." 💀

NAIM AND RYAN — OR IS IT? — HAVE A TENDER MOMENT THAT'S ABOUT TO GO VERY, VERY WRONG.

COLONY

HOLDS UP A MONSTROUS, MUTATED MIRROR

TRAIN TO BUSAN **DIRECTOR YEON SANG-HO'S NEW ZOMBIE THRILLER MUSES ON AI SLOP, GROUPTHINK AND THE LOSS OF THE INDIVIDUAL.**

BY AMBER T

Zombies are never just zombies. Whether it be the shuffling shoppers of *Dawn of the Dead* or the paranoid post-9/11 ragers of *28 Days Later*, the shambling figure of the zombie has always served as a stand-in for timely issues plaguing their more-living counterparts. *Colony*, the latest nerve-shredding horror-thriller from *Train to Busan* director Yeon Sang-ho, is no different.

"The zombie is a creature that inherently carries social implications," says Yeon, speaking with us ahead of *Colony*'s Cannes premiere. "Ever since Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, zombies have functioned as a physical manifestation of the latent fears harbored by the society of that era. I believe that it is a perfect medium to illustrate our current lives or potential anxieties through a symbolic fable told in the grammar of a genre piece."

In *Colony*, a Seoul-set high-rise building is locked down after a rapidly mutating virus escapes containment and transforms those inside into rabid, bloodthirsty beasts. A group of survivors led by biotechnology professor Se-jeong (*My Sassy Girl*'s Gianna Jun, in her first film role in a decade) must not only try to escape,

CHOI HYEON SEOK (JI CHANG-WOOK), CHOI HYEON HUI (KIM SHIN-ROCK), SE JEONG (GIANNA JUN) AND SEO YOUNG CHEOL (KOO KYO-HWAN) ARE TRAPPED BY THE HIVE MIND OF THE *COLONY*.

"THE ZOMBIE IS A CREATURE THAT INHERENTLY CARRIES SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS."

- YEON SANG-HO

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WELL GO USA ENTERTAINMENT

SE JEONG AND AN INFECTED INDIVIDUAL MODEL THE LATEST IN ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE CHIC.

but try to stay one step ahead of the virus as it harnesses the collective intelligence of the now-connected colony to trigger instantaneous evolution en masse in what is easily the freshest take on zombie physiology in forever.

Working with Korea's top contemporary dance team, led by choreographer Jeon Young, Yeon instructed the actors to "move like ten distinct fingers playing the piano," highlighting the fact that while the zombies of *Colony* may still be individual beings, they are all working together as a single organism towards the same goal of assimilation, often physically fusing together as a boundaryless mass of flesh and mucus.

It's through this physicality that *Colony*'s thematic message becomes clear. "We are living in an era of ultra-high-speed information exchange," Yeon muses. "Because of this incredible speed, collective thinking itself can feel like a single living organism. We have even seen the emergence of AI, which was created by mimicking this very human exchange of information. I've had moments where I felt that minority opinions have suddenly become powerless. This is the root of the fear I feel today. In *Colony*, through the zombies, I wanted to speak about the necessity of human individuality."

This theme of human individuality is reflective of a trend of the last decade or so, in which the focus of zombie movies has shifted from a fear of their animalistic inhumanity to their more human qualities. The infected of Robin Aubert's 2017 film *Ravenous* demonstrate ritualistic tendencies associated with social culture, stacking objects for a reason known only to them, while the children of *The Girl with All the Gifts* are almost entirely human — until they get hungry, that is. Just this year, Nia DaCosta's *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple* depicted its 'King of the Infected', the hulking Samson, regaining cognition, while the zombies of Capcom's *Resident Evil Requiem* retain not only the ability to speak, but are also compelled to perform the same routine actions they did in life, like cleaning, cooking, or singing. Simply put, we're no longer scared of zombies because they're the other; we're scared of them because they're *just like us*.

And *just like us*, the zombies of *Colony* are susceptible to a specific type of mob mentality exacerbated by falsehood. In the initial stages of their evolution, they are initially unable to tell the difference between real people and pictures, attacking the latter indiscriminately in what could easily be observed as an eerie indictment of

"IN *COLONY*, THROUGH THE ZOMBIES, I WANTED TO SPEAK ABOUT THE NECESSITY OF HUMAN INDIVIDUALITY."

- YEON SANG-HO

SEO YOUNG CHEOL IS KEEPING A LOT COOLER THAN WE WOULD.

TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK: THE ZOMBIES OF *COLONY* WILL SHUNT AS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOAL.

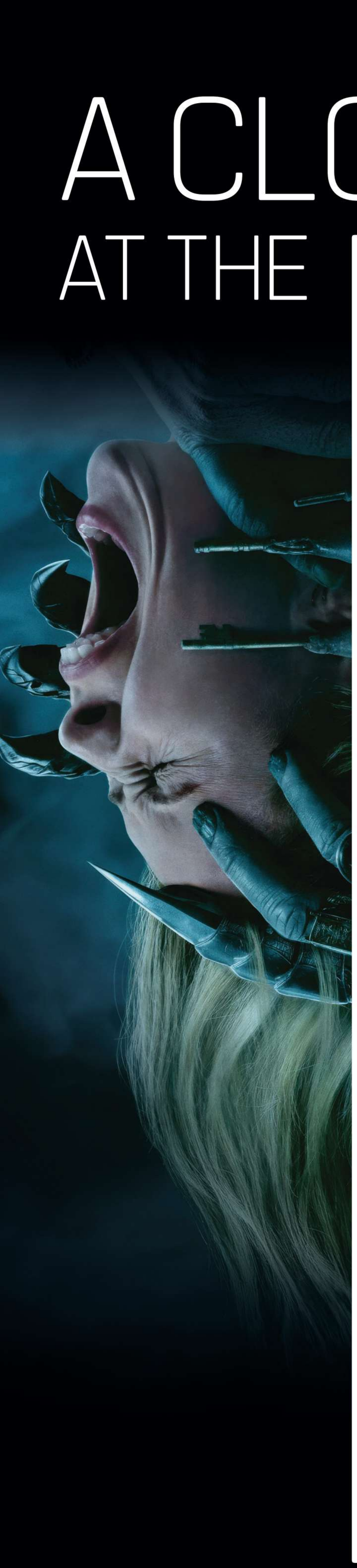
our current AI-exacerbated culture of misinformation, and its ability (or inherent desire?) to stoke violence against those whose dare to oppose it.

"The danger of AI and ultra-high-speed information exchange lies in the fact that minority opinions can become powerless," says Yeon, confirming his stance as a creative in no uncertain terms. "From a biological perspective, all colonial organisms produce mutations — which are, in a sense, minority opinions. The reason they produce these mutations is that if a colony shared only a single trait, the entire population could be wiped out by an external threat, such as a disease or specific vulnerability. This is the reason behind creating such mutations. This biological principle applies directly to human society as well. It is the very reason why diversity, fueled by minority opinions and individuality, is so crucial."

This keen eye for humanist horror is why Yeon's aforementioned modern classic *Train to Busan* is still so endearing to horror fans. Among the immensely intense high octane scares and grisly gore is an achingly tender plea for altruism and empathy, undercut with a signature current of pitch black humor that makes South Korean horror so special. A decade after release, Yeon recognizes that *Train to Busan* remains so beloved in great part due to its rich themes: "Although it is a zombie film, it naturally weaves in various reflections on the true meaning of humanity, which I think is what resonates with audiences. I see *Train to Busan* as a result of embracing the many strengths of genre films in the past. Therefore, it would be a great honor for me if future films were to take the strengths of *Train to Busan* and continue to evolve them even further."

Speaking of future films, with a number of horror features that explore the human condition in all its ugliness under his belt, does Yeon ever feel like moving into less intense genre territory? Quite the contrary, in fact. "I have several horror films currently in development," he teases. "The project coming out in the near future is the Netflix series, *Human Vapor*. I served as a Writer and Executive Producer for this series, which was directed by Shinzo Katayama, who previously directed the Disney+ series, *Gannibal*. The series is a reboot of the legendary Japanese "tokusatsu" (live-action special effects film), *The Human Vapor*, which is a classic among Japanese horror films. It was a truly enjoyable process to bring this classic work back to life for a modern audience. I hope you all look forward to it." 💀

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE FURTHER



DIRECTOR JACOB CHASE WAVES IN FANGO FOR SOME DETAILS ON

INSIDIOUS
OUT OF THE FURTHER

BY RICHARD NEWBY

THE RED DOOR HAS BEEN CLOSED, BUT THE DEMONIC DENIZENS OF THE FURTHER HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS WITH THE WORLD OF THE LIVING. AND THEY WANT OUT! DIRECTOR JACOB CHASE TAKES US INSIDE *INSIDIOUS: OUT OF THE FURTHER*, WHICH PROMISES TO EXPAND THE LORE OF THE LONG-RUNNING FRANCHISE WITH A NEW FAMILY, NEW DEMONS, AND NEW STAKES. ALONGSIDE THE RETURN OF FAN-FAVORITE LIN SHAYE'S ELISE RAINER, THE ELEMENTS OF THIS NEWEST INSTALLMENT PAY RESPECT TO THE PAST WHILE ALSO CHARTING A BOLD NEW COURSE FOR THE FRANCHISE. SO, TRAVELER, ARE YOU PREPARED TO GO FURTHER THAN EVER BEFORE?

You've been a big fan of the *Insidious* franchise since it started in 2010. How'd you get involved in the process of actually making one?

Yeah, I am a huge fan. I watched all these movies on opening weekends since the first one, and I've been obsessed with them forever. I'd been doing other work at Blumhouse, and then this idea came up, 'What would you think of taking over the next chapter of the *Insidious* franchise?' It was an absolute no-brainer for me as a huge fan. My wife was pregnant at the time, and I was like, 'Jess, we got to pack our bags and go make an *Insidious* movie.' [*Laughs*]. It was kind of a dream come true, honestly.

ELISE RAINIER (LIN SHAYE) IS BACK TO HELP GEMMA
(AMELIA EVE) WITH HER *INSIDIOUS*-NESS.

HER

What lessons about making scary movies did you carry with you from your first horror feature, *Come Play* (2020), to *Insidious: Out of the Further*?

What I loved about making *Come Play* was, it was an original story from me and had characters I really cared about. The biggest thing I took away from making *Come Play* was how much great characters help horror matter. If it's people we don't care about and scary things are happening to them, I find that it's less exciting for an audience. We're less invested. That was one of the things that worked really well about *Come Play*, was people really cared about these characters. So, I really tried to bring those lessons to *Insidious* as well.

Insidious has always had great characters from the beginning. Leigh Whannell is such an amazing writer. That's a huge reason why the first movie has resonated so much with people… yes, it's got amazing jumpscares and great tension, great creature design and entities. But at the end of the day, it's characters you care about in the Lambert family and of course Elise. That was my biggest thing, just keeping that heart alive. I love horror with heart.

One of the things I appreciated about *Come Play* was your skill at creating a realistic family dynamic, and working with kids in such a way that their experience feels believable. This new *Insidious* movie also has a family dynamic and a kid at the center. Is that just part of creating characters that you care about, in that it's kind of easier to latch onto a family dynamic and kids?

I don't know if it's easier, but it's definitely something I respond to. I was a child actor when I was a kid, and so I have always enjoyed working with kid actors because there's a sort of authenticity to them, where they're not thinking about their next big movie role or the big franchise they want to star in or whatever. They're just being themselves. I love when we can put an audience in the shoes of someone like that where there's no egos, it's just them being their honest selves.

I grew up on Spielberg movies and Amblin films, and there's something so magical about putting a younger character in a heightened world that really takes the audience by the hand

IS IT ALL IN GEMMA'S MIND? (BELOW) NO, IT'S NOT. HAVE YOU EVEN SEEN THESE MOVIES?

and takes them on the journey. I love doing that. There's a kid in the center who's an amazing young actress, Island [Austin], but then her mom, played by Amelia Eve, is really the star and incredible in the film. That family dynamic helps us care so much about what they're going through.

***Out of the Further* is the sixth film in the *Insidious* franchise. There's not too many modern horror franchises that have such a deep legacy. What was it that you wanted to bring to this one to make it feel fresh?**

I probably had the same reaction that everyone would have initially, which is like, 'Oh my gosh, I can't believe they're making another one.' And I felt like, okay, there's been five movies that are great and have focused on a few different families, mainly the Lambert family, of course, but it gave us an opportunity to try something a little new. I wanted to make a movie that honored the other films and hopefully the fans are going to love.

Because it's the sixth one, it's like, 'Okay, I don't think the fans want to see the exact same thing again.' I know I don't. So having this idea of expanding the lore and creating a character who has this new unique ability, and she's not just a traveler like previous characters in the movies. She actually has this new ability to bring entities from The Further to the real world. That, to me, was like,

‘Oh, that opens us up for whole new types of scare sequences, whole new kinds of villains,’ and really puts us at the center of the horror in a way we haven’t done in the other five *Insidious* movies before this.

During the writing process, how soon did you land on that idea of Amelia Eve’s character, Gemma, being able to bring these demonic figures out of The Further?

That was a really early part of the discovery process. Working with James [Wan] and Leigh [Whannell] and Sony and the Blum team, we knew we wanted to do something big and bold, and that was really the initial idea that sparked for all of us. So, it was building a world and characters around that. And then as well, there was an original draft by David Leslie Johnson who wrote some amazing stuff. It was a team effort, and ultimately, I’m really happy we landed on this idea because it led to some really, really fun scare sequences that were pretty awesome to shoot.

I remember watching your *60 Second Film School* episode for *Come Play*, and you had mentioned you built haunted houses with friends at an earlier point in your career. How much did that play into building the scare sequences, like that one?

It was a mix of everything I loved between horror and filmmaking and live theater. It’s really where I cut my teeth learning how to scare people in that live experience thing. And it’s a huge part of how I create horror sequences in movies. I love to make an audience feel first-person, like they are the main character. I think of things through a main character’s eyes, and put the audience in their perspective constantly. I just think of what are the scariest things that I wouldn’t want to have happen to me. Between the endless pillow fort maze and the gnarly dentist sequence in the film, those are just a couple of great scary sequences.

I want it to be fun. A huge part of why I was a big fan of *Insidious* was the movies have a sense of fun to them. It’s not a punishing kind of horror film. It’s one where you want to go with an audience and sort of laugh at the suspense, and the nervous giggles, which is the best part of watching it with an audience. In every sequence, I’m striving for that.

PHOTOS BY NARELLE PORTANIER & SARAH ENTICKNAP, COURTESY OF SCREENGEMS

> “GEMMA’S NOT JUST A TRAVELER LIKE PREVIOUS CHARACTERS IN THE MOVIES. SHE HAS THIS NEW ABILITY TO BRING ENTITIES FROM THE FURTHER TO THE REAL WORLD.”
>
> - JACOB CHASE -

Have you ever had a chance to attend one of the Halloween Horror Nights at Universal? Blumhouse did that *Insidious: The Further* haunted house attraction.

I’ve been to a bunch of those! In fact, this last year, I went through with Lin Shaye because we were working on *Out of the Further*, and that was such a highlight for me because I walked through the maze with the actual Elise. We were holding each other, and it was so fun watching her get scared because it’s like, ‘Oh, Elise shouldn’t get scared of any of this.’ But it’s Lin Shaye. Just seeing all of the fans, it was like walking through with the celebrity, like the *Insidious* movies come to life. Even the people in the maze were like, ‘Whoa, it’s Elise.’ [*Laughs*].

GEMMA LEARNS THAT THE MALEVOLENT FORCES OF THE FURTHER DO NOT RESPECT PERSONAL SPACE.

Tell me about working with Lin Shaye. She's a horror legend, and she's devoted a lot to this franchise over the years. Elise is such a great character. I know Lin has talked about elements of the character she's wanted to explore over the years. What was her creative input on this film?

Lin is really an incredible person and talent, of course. I really see Elise's character as sort of the heart of the franchise. She's the connective tissue that's tied all the films together. So, her input and experience was really valuable to me. When I first had a draft of the script, I met with her, and we talked through the character in great depth. She had so much of this knowledge of the character and ideas that have never made it into the films. But that's what makes a great actor; she has this whole history of the character. So, I tried in this film to bring some of that more to light, and we get to know a little bit more about her in this one.

Of course, I still think the character's best to leave fairly mysterious throughout, but we get to see a bit more of her personality come out. I loved being able to put her at the center of this film in a big way because she's amazing to watch. She adds a bit of gravitas to it. It's like, 'Oh, even though we're moving on to a new family in the franchise, Elise's presence makes it feel 100% still in the DNA of *Insidious*.'

You mentioned you saw these movies as they came out, but how much rewatching of the previous entries did you have to do to keep track of all the lore and the rules and the various timelines that are happening?

It's funny how much. When you actually sit down and study them, it's like, 'Oh, my gosh, there's so many flashbacks and different characters, overlapping timelines, and different rules.' I honestly had seen the *Insidious* movies a ton. I knew them fairly well, but of course, once I got this job and I got to take over the franchise for this entry, I've watched all the movies on repeat for a year, basically, wanting to know every detail.

Also, I talked to previous filmmakers who worked on them. Of course, Leigh Whannell especially was very involved with me on this. There I had the brain at the center of it right in front of me. I wanted to keep the rules and lore in lockstep with the rest of the movies. But also, because we're kind of opening a new chapter and getting to explore new rules, I needed to know the old rules so we could show how the rules have changed or how we've uncovered new parts of The Further.

Along with those new parts, can you say anything about the new demons we'll see, or the VFX and practical effects process, without revealing too much?

I will say there's a lot of new, amazing, practical demons and entities in this movie. I love practical effects. If you saw *Come Play*, you know I love the big practical creature work. We worked with Odd Studios out in Australia, and they designed some really incredible work for this film. It was also an opportunity to potentially bring back a few fan favorites, some of my favorites from other entries in delicious little ways. Also, I love Joe Bishara who plays the Lipstick, Red-Faced Demon. That's such an iconic look. Obviously, that scare in the first movie is one of the all-time greatest horror scares. It also, for me, was like, 'Oh, that's *one* kind of weird-looking dude in The Further; we should have more of those.' [*Laughs*]. So, we had fun creating a few more… Lipstick cousins, you might say. 💀

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

MACABRO FOUNDER EDNA CAMPOS AND ACTOR FERNANDO HUERTA.

CINE DE TERROR EN ESPAÑOL

macabro AT 25 años

MEXICO CITY'S FIRST AND LARGEST HORROR FILM FESTIVAL CELEBRATES A QUARTER-CENTURY OF SCARES.

BY SEAN ABLEY

CAMPOS AND MASTER OF HORROR MICK GARRIS.

Macabro, Mexico City's first horror film festival, turns twenty-five in 2026, but the fest's origin story begins with a pair of high school students who share a passion for cinema. "Macabro started from my personal taste for horror movies," recounts Edna Campos, the festival's founder, "but it also came from underground movies from New York." Campos and her high school friend, Arturo Castelán, spent their teenage years voraciously consuming films from any source available to them, hungry not only for the mainstream and arthouse programming of the city's Muestra Internacional de Cine, but frequently ordering off-menu for the edgiest of international fare as well. "We used to watch VHS videos with these strange movies from the US or Europe," recalls Campos with a grin. "There were horror movies that were completely outside commercial movies. And we thought, 'Oh, my God, what is that?'"

After graduating high school and college, the two friends decided to create something based on their love of cinema and Castelán's LGBTQ+ activism. Castelán, with Campos' help, was the driving force behind Mix Mexico, now the most important festival of LGBTQ+ films in the country. As Campos recalls, festivals in Mexico were very specialized at the time, but horror was conspicuously absent. After helping build Mix Mexico, Campos decided the time was right for *her* passion. "I wanted to do something with horror because I really loved (the genre)," she explains. "I have a very intellectual approach to horror. I used to analyze it because when I was a little girl I used to be afraid of everything, but horror films worked for me. So I was like, 'Okay, how does this work?'" She used those same analytical skills to create and program Macabro. "I want to have a very wide selection so we can have films like *The Exorcist* or the very, very underground Super 8 films that I saw when I was learning about cinema."

One obstacle Campos has fought from the beginning is the perception of horror in this very Catholic country. Exorcisms and religion are the main ingredients in many of the most popular Mexican genre films, which lines up with the firmly held spiritual

beliefs of a large percentage of the population. “That’s bad, that’s evil,” is the common perception of her festival’s programming, according to Campos. As for the festival founder, she isn’t afraid of spirits but does take steps to keep everyone happy, in our realm and beyond. “I ask for permission to do the festival,” she explains, referring not only to the spirits, but the building in which they dwell. “I ask the place where I am, ‘Let us do the festival. Let this flow…’”

In retrospect, Campos admits she would approach one aspect of the festival differently given the chance. “I should have named it ‘Fantastic Film Festival,’” she confesses. “When I go to a possible sponsor, (they react) ‘Oh, horror! No, that’s violence…’ And I say, ‘Oh, no, no, it’s not violence. It’s all cinema. There are monsters, yes, but the blood, it’s fake.’” That being said, Campos is never one to shy away from the far boundaries of “proper” content; Macabro’s inaugural 2002 screening was Lee Demarbre’s and Ian Driscoll’s *Jesus Christ Vampire Hunter*, and the festival has been the home of Mexican premieres of films such as *Midsommar*, *American Mary*, *Human Centipede II*, and *Tragedy Girls*.

(TOP LEFT) CAMPOS AND ACTOR KEN FOREE; (TOP RIGHT) GARRIS IS HONORED AT MACABRO; (BOTTOM) GIGI SAUL GUERRERO HAS HER SOCKS SHOCKED OFF AT THE FEST.

In addition to the content naysayers, Campos has faced inevitable chauvinism from the moment she founded the festival in 2002. “There were practically no women directing fantasy or horror film festivals,” she reminds us. “Since this was the first festival of its kind in Mexico and the second to be founded in Latin America, I encountered a lot of comments that not only questioned my taste for the genre but also tried to find the ‘male brain’ behind the festival.” Campos now reserves her energy for programming the festival and promoting horror and lets her work speak for itself. “Along the way, I’ve met many women who also love horror films,” she happily shares. “Today, I celebrate seeing how many of them are involved in films, festivals, publications, novels, and music.” In 2020 Campos launched Macabro Coven, created to highlight women’s contributions to the festival’s programming.

The metric of a festival's cachet is often measured in buzz-worthy guests, and over the years Macabro has hosted many genre favorites, including filmmakers Stuart Gordon, Mick Garris, Tyler MacIntyre, and Mexican writer/director/actor Gigi Saul Guerrero; screenwriter Dennis Paoli; Mexican novelist Sandra Becerril (“the Stephen King of Mexico”); actors Sean Gunn and Ken Foree; Italian horror royalty Lamberto Bava and Luigi Cozzi; underground cinema provocateur Nick Zedd; and dozens of filmmakers from Latin America, including Jorge Michel Grau (*Somos lo que hay*, aka *We Are What We Are*).

Despite the inevitable hurdles all festivals face and the specific challenges of genre programming in Mexico, Macabro has thrived for over two decades. Although many years have passed, Campos still regards horror as the panacea she did as a child. “When I was a little girl, I was really afraid of everything. So I found in horror the medicine to cure my fears.” 💀

PHOTOS COURTESY OF EDNA CAMPOS

NOVELIST SANDRA BECERRIL IS A POPULAR GUEST AT MACABRO.

TRAGEDY GIRLS DIRECTOR TYLER MACINTYRE.

WE ARE WHAT WE ARE DIRECTOR JORGE MICHEL GRAU.

TV
LAND

Leaving The World Richer:

SID & MARTY KROFFT

The Saturday Morning pioneers are gone, but the mark they've left on pop culture – and generations of creators – is indelible.

By Tara Ansley

For many of us who grew up before algorithms and endless streaming, Sid & Marty Krofft's *H.R. Pufnstuf* wasn't just a show — it was a portal into another world. The Saturday morning live-action series was my mom's favorite, and then it became mine. She hunted down VHS tapes for me long before YouTube or Netflix made everything instantly accessible. I fell in love with the chaos, the color, the strange musicality of it all: Freddy the Flute, Witchiepoo, a world that felt handmade and entirely its own. I sing the songs now to my eight-month-old and three-year-old.

The kind of creative fearlessness displayed by Sid & Marty Krofft stays with you. It shapes you. Long before producing, before acquisitions, before any version of a career in entertainment, I was just a kid who loved weird storytelling. Without that early permission to be loud, different, colorful, I don't know that I would've had the instinct, or the courage, to chase something like FANGORIA in the first place.

I was lucky enough to thank them directly before they passed on (Marty in 2023, and Sid earlier this year). It's wild to tell someone you idolized exactly what they meant to you, have them see what you accomplished and have them know they helped plant that seed. A small handful of creators shaped who I am, but Sid & Marty were truly the first. When they heard we had acquired FANGORIA and STARLOG, their genuine excitement meant more to me than I could have expressed at the time.

And in a strange, beautiful way, their worlds traveled with me through childhood, through my career, and now into the lives of my own kids. My grandmother showed my mom. My mom showed me. I showed my kids. And I'm hoping one day they'll show theirs: a fifth generation singing "Oranges, Smoranges," another kid finding permission to be loud and weird and wonderfully themselves.

That's what great art does. It doesn't stay put. It moves through time, through people, through living rooms and memories. That's the quiet miracle of art made with someone's hands and soul. It doesn't just entertain. It outlives its makers and finds new kids who needed it just as much.

To create something that outlives you, that is not a small thing. What a profound and humbling thing, to leave the world richer simply by having made something people love and want to share. That is everything, and that's what Sid & Marty Krofft did.

And to my mom: I love you. Thank you for letting me be me. And for hunting down every VHS so I could find out what happened to Freddy. You had no idea what you started. 💀

PHOTOS (TOP) BY MICHAEL GERMANA/GLOBE PHOTOS/ZUMAPRESS.COM • (BOTTOM) COURTESY OF ALAMY/IMUSIC

JOSH TURI'S

[NOTES FROM THE SHOP]

TRIAL BY TROMA

IN THIS INSTALLMENT, A YOUNG JOSH TOILS AT LLOYD KAUFMAN'S LOW-BUDGET STUDIO DURING ITS GLORY DAYS.

THIS IS ME WEARING THE MID-STAGE TRANSFORMATION MASK FOR "THE EVIL ONE" FROM *SGT. KABUKIMAN N.Y.P.D.*.

In 1989 I was about to graduate high school, and I'd been trying to figure out what was next. Should I head to the west coast? Am I staying in New Jersey? I didn't know. All I knew for sure was that my life was going to be about film and make-up effects.

Around this time I was an intern for a great makeup artist named Tim Considine (RIP). Tim put me through the wringer, as any great mentor should. He taught me about mold making, foam running, sculpting, etc. More importantly, I picked up lunch, swept the floor, scraped a massive amount of plaster buckets, and was an all-around shop rat.

About a week before graduation, Tim called me and said, "Hey we're gonna start a movie in a week," (actually he said, "get your ass to the city next week," haha). It was for TROMA! The movie was *Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.* YEEEEESSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS!!

I graduated high school on a Wednesday, and by Monday I was helping put together a shop on the corner of 43rd St. and 9th Ave — the heart of Hell's Kitchen. Let's do this!!

This was the start of my journey with Troma, and of course, Lloyd Kaufman. If the internship with Tim was my primary education, Troma was going to be my college!

For the next five months the crew lived, breathed and bled *Kabukiman*. I was barely 18 years old, working 20-hour days, making $78 a week, and eating the worst food. But I was also living my dream. I was working on a movie where I was sculpting monsters, making prosthetics, having the best time in the shop and on set, and was allowed to explore any weird idea I had for an effect. There was no better place to be for a monster kid.

I was working with an amazing group of people, from whom I learned every day. One of the coolest people was the special effects supervisor, Pericles Lewnes (*Redneck Zombies*). Peri was intense, funny, talented, and all about Troma. Peri had a unique trick he used to do: he could shove a tube up his nose and pull it out his mouth. We would then connect a fire extinguisher to the end of the tube, and he could shoot green slime out his nose. Everyone loved it! Who the hell wouldn't.

Once we started shooting, I was an onset tech, just trying my best not to screw up. I must've done something right, because eventually they asked me to assist with the Kabukiman makeup, which consisted of a foam latex lower face appliance, a vacuformed upper mask, and urethane and hair cowl. I was having the time of my life.

On top of all that, I have a couple of small cameos. I played "Reporter Without a Notebook" and "Cross-Eyed Reaction Guy." Oscar-worthy, both. But the best (and my favorite) cameo is The Evil One! I got to be the monster at the end. (I'm pretty sure it was because no one else would do it.) So not only did I get to make it, but I got to wear it!? Nuts! It was 10 degrees outside, we were shooting in Hoboken, on the river at night, I was covered in Ultraslime and meal worms, I had frostbite... it was the greatest night ever!!

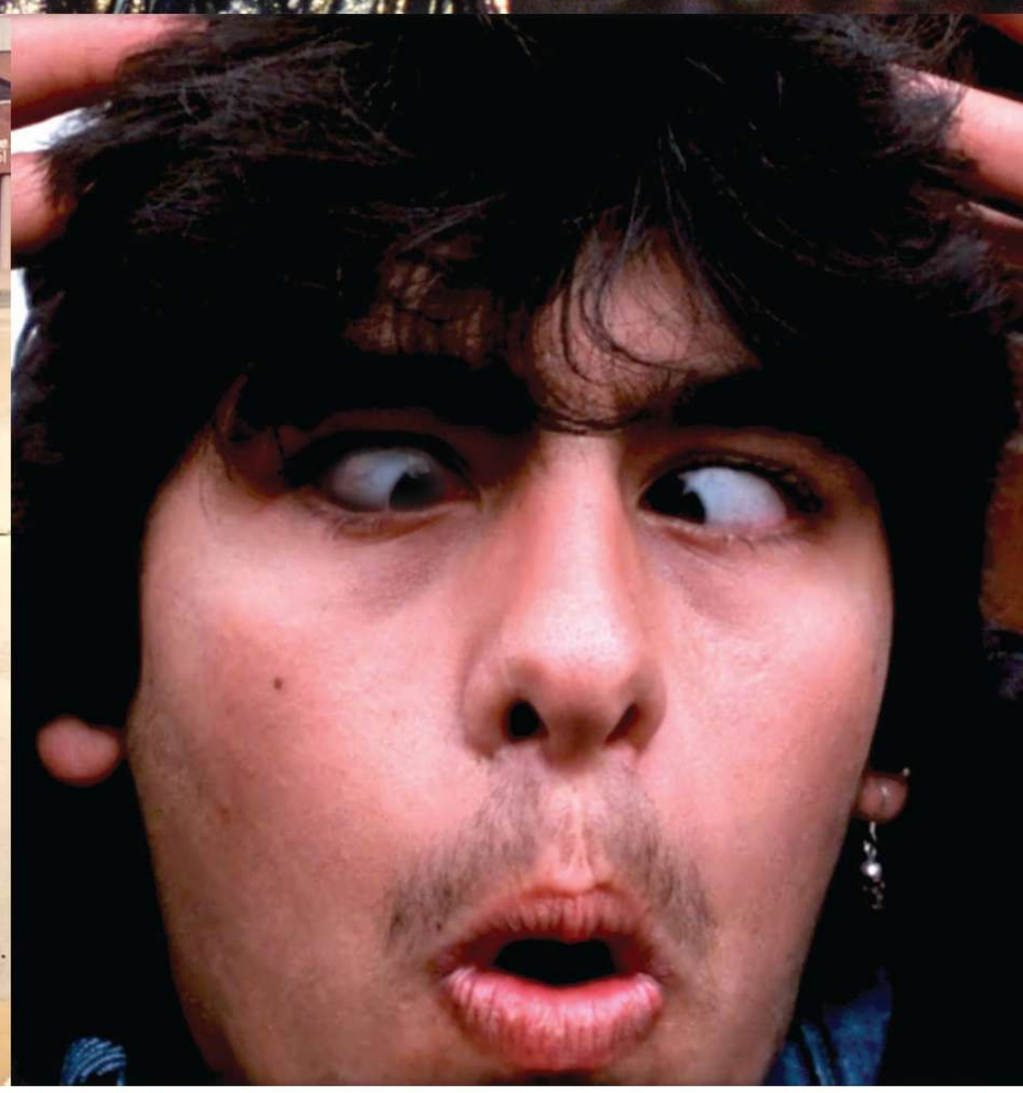
The movie's end sequence on the dock was nuts — we had different animals on set. A monkey, a jaguar, and a lion. The lion and jaguar obviously were in cages, and the monkey was hanging out with the crew. Now, all day, this monkey was messing with the lion. He kept throwing rocks at his cage and howling at him, I mean the entire time, and he was really starting to piss the lion off.

We start shooting. In the scene, the monkey has to be handcuffed to the lead actor (it's not a real handcuff, but they're still attached), and they have to walk past the lion. Well, the lion had enough, saw his chance and took it. In the middle of a take, the lion reaches over and grabs the monkey; he's got him in his mouth. He's not killing him; he's just holding him. It's as if the lion was kind of saying, "See what I can do, they don't call me the king for nothing."

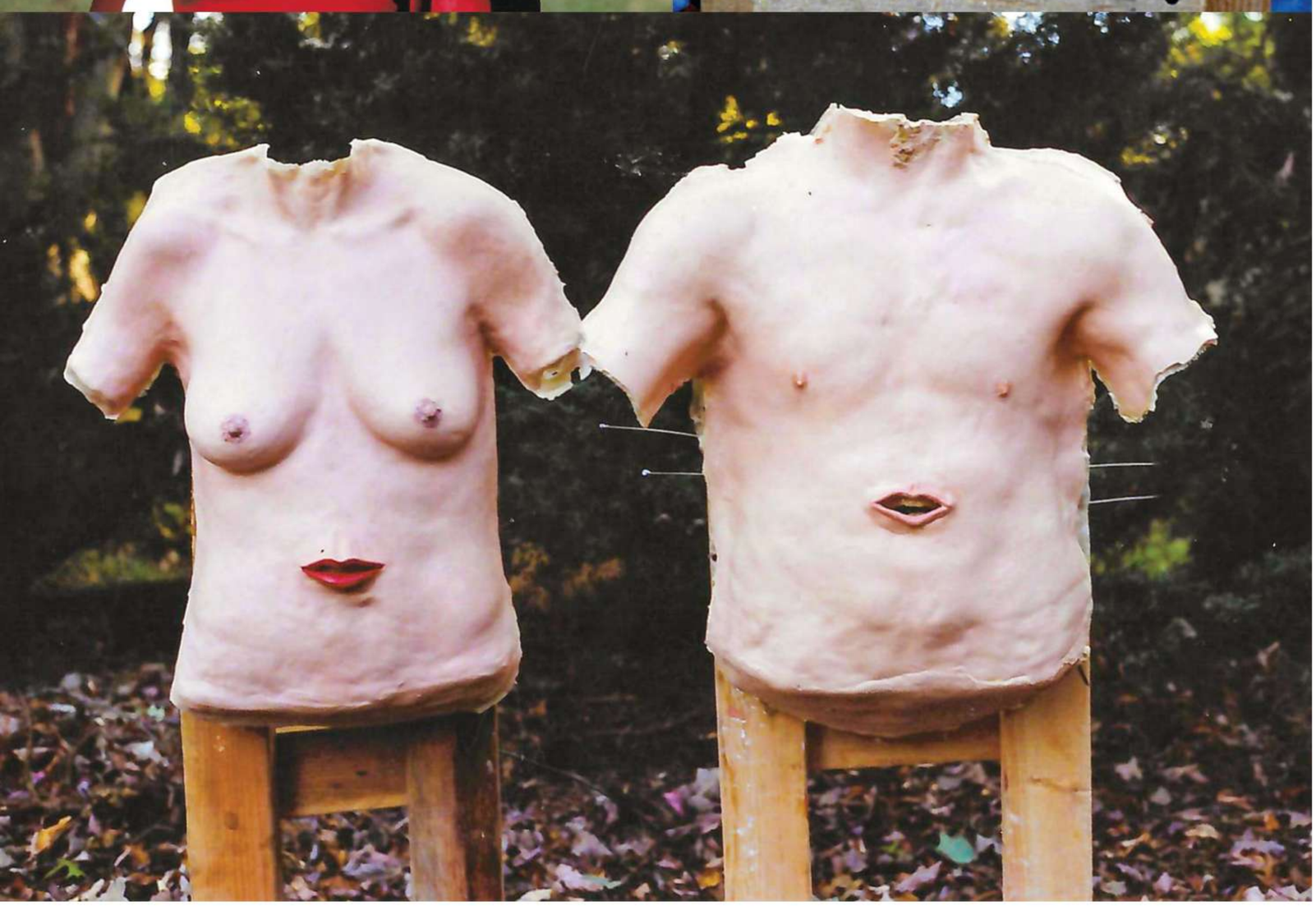
[TOP] ME AS "THE EVIL ONE" IN THE FINALE OF *KABUKIMAN*.

[BELOW LEFT] ME AND PERI LEWNES WITH THE KABUKIMAN DUMMY I BUILT.

[BELOW RIGHT] 18-YEAR-OLD ME BEING VERY SERIOUS AND PROFESSIONAL ON SET.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOSH TURI



[TOP] DOING ONE OF THE MAKEUPS FOR *KABUKIMAN*'S THEATER SEQUENCE.

[MIDDLE LEFT] SGT. KABUKIMAN IN ALL HIS GLORY. I DID THE APPLICATION OF THIS MAKEUP.

[MIDDLE RIGHT] THE INNER PUPPETEERING CONTROLS FOR THE MALE TORSO FROM *CLASS OF NUKE 'EM HIGH 2*.

[BOTTOM] THE FRONT OF THOSE TORSOS. IT'S NOT CRONENBERG, BUT IT'S NOT *NOT* CRONENBERG, Y'KNOW?

Buuuuuuuut, the monkey is still attached to the actor, who is now screaming at the top of his lungs. The trainers all come running to help. Suddenly, the lion just spits the monkey out. The animals were fine. The actor was fine, nobody was bleeding, nobody was hurt. Absolute insanity. Everyone was safe. For the rest of the shoot everybody kept singing, "the lion ate the monkey, the lion ate the monkey…" Not sure the actor found it funny as we did.

Kabukiman was my introduction into the world of Troma, and to filmmaking as well.

The next project I did was *Class of Nuke 'Em High Part 2*. This would be an opportunity for me to do a project that I was in control of (sort of), and I was up for the challenge. This was the great thing about working for Troma: if you worked hard, and showed you had some gumption, they would give you opportunities you couldn't get anywhere else.

They shot the film in California, but for one reason or another there were a bunch of effects that they didn't get. My build list: two mechanical torsos with mouths in their stomachs (yup, you read that right); a gelatin stomach for a small creature (built by someone else in California) to burst out of; a six-inch cable-controlled tongue; and various prosthetics. I recruited a buddy of mine and we got to work.

The torsos were a combo of cable control and good old-fashioned puppeteering. They had to do various things: The mouths would open and close, slight lip movement, and they could pucker to look like a kiss. They shot a montage of them singing, smoking, shaving, and even kissing each other. Very silly, but a blast to shoot.

For the stomach bursting, I brushed in a thin layer of gelatin to the torso mold and backed it with plaster bandages except for the area where we had to break through. I then mounted the torso to a board that was painted to look like asphalt. I laid underneath the board and just pushed it through. Worked great. And of course, because it's Troma, we added plenty of blood and slime.

Interesting side note: They didn't have a location for the shoot, so we shot all the effects sequences in my

mother's driveway and backyard in Jersey. The neighbors were out in full force.

Which brings us to *Citizen Toxie: The Toxic Avenger Part 4*. I worked once again with Tim, who brought me in to oversee the day-to-day build. We had a ton of effects on this one, and we had a crew of about eight or ten.

Our build consisted of body parts, dummies, prosthetics, a massive amount of gore, and some fun character make-ups, including Dolphinman, Mad Cowboy, and the Toxie Twins. But our most important build would be Toxie himself. Tim would focus on the main sculpture of Toxie. Once the sculpture was approved, we would then take it, break it down (float the sculpt) into a couple of pieces, refine the sculpts and mold. On the previous couple films, Toxie was more of a mask, a thicker poly-foam style mask where the movement was a little restricted. For this one, Lloyd wanted the makeup to have way more movement. The final makeup was a foam latex cowl that went from the top of his head and down onto the shoulders, leaving the face open, and then finished with a facial appliance.

We started building everything at the shop in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and about a month in, the entire production headed up to Poughkeepsie. Once production started, we decided to split up the makeup team: Tim would go up to location with a small crew, stay up there, and they were responsible for daily application and repair, while a very small crew and I would stay in Brooklyn, keep building, and then send things up. We also had to keep making the Toxie prosthetics, and sending them up to location with a PA. This plan was an absolute time killer; it made zero sense. So, I drove up over the weekend with the molds, made a stop at Home Depot, grabbed a pizza and a twelve pack, and when I got up there Tim and I spent the day building an oven, foam area and appliance storage. It was a great day.

I couldn't have asked for a better experience with these films. Sure, it wasn't always rainbows and gold. But the good always outweighs the bad.

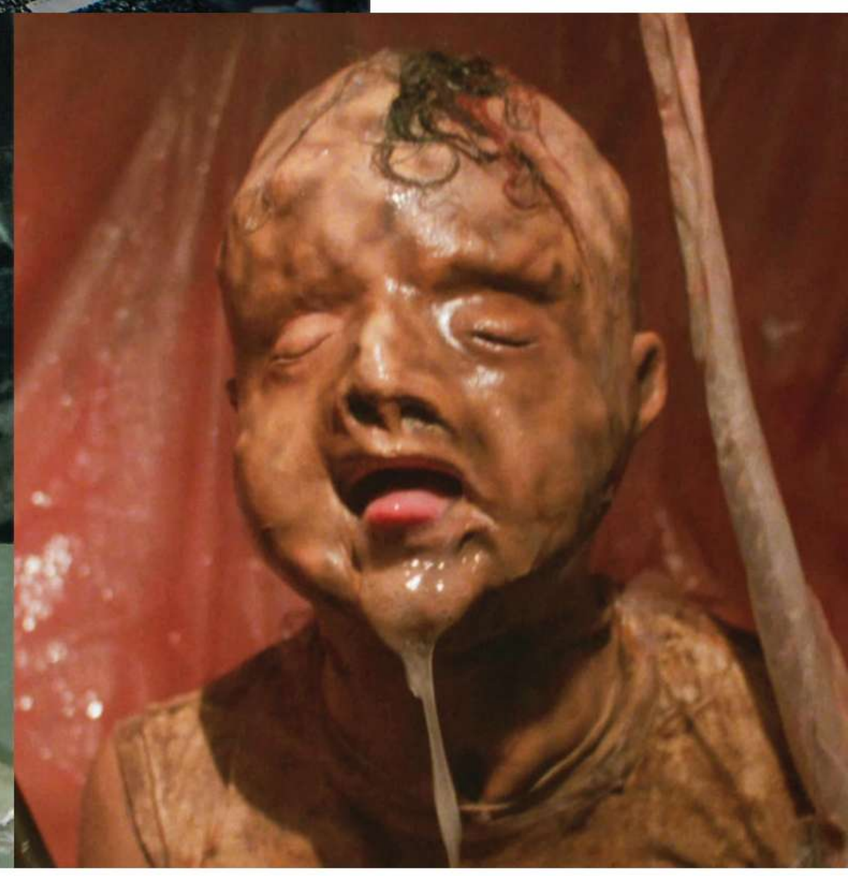
But with me and Troma, it's not just about the movies. Over the years, I've had the chance to do a few company projects for them as well. I had the opportunity to create a new Toxie mask for Troma to use at promos, and in videos, etc. To be able to get your hands on a classic character like that, and to put your own stamp on it, is what a lot of prosthetic artists crave. And yes, I consider Toxie a classic character, right up

[TOP] BEHOLD DOLPHINMAN!

[MIDDLE] BEHOLD DOLPHINMAN'S UNDERSKULL!

[BOTTOM LEFT] THIS TOXIE SCULPT WAS USED FOR TROMA PROMO APPEARANCES.

[BOTTOM RIGHT] ONE OF THE "TOXIE TWINS" FROM *CITIZEN TOXIE: THE TOXIC AVENGER PART 4.*



there with Mickey Mouse, Godzilla, Jason, etc. Lloyd also contacted me and told me he wanted a stone Toxie bust above the door on his home. I sculpted a ¾ look, molded it and sent it to a foundry. They made the stone that was placed above his door. I've driven past it a few times. Pretty stoked when I see it.

A few years ago, I had the chance to thank Lloyd for everything. He was getting a lifetime achievement award from the New York Horror Film Festival. (Incidentally, I still build that award for them every year.) I asked them if I could present the award to him. They said yes, and I got to give a small speech of appreciation, and hand him his award. What an insanely fun night!

I hope you can tell how sentimental I am about Troma. I am a proud graduate of Tromaville University.

Takeitease.

BY ANTHONY EVERITT

MONSTER KID ZERO

SOME OF THE GENRE'S MOST TALENTED CRAFTSPEOPLE PAY HOMAGE TO THE LATE BOB BURNS: MONSTER MAKER, ARCHIVIST, MENTOR AND FRIEND.

WHEN YOU HAVE A MONSTER COLLECTION LIKE BOB BURNS DID, YOU NEED TO BE CAREFUL IT DOESN'T TURN ON YOU. (IN REALITY, FAMILY FRIEND MICHAEL DRAKE IS UNDER JOHN GOODWIN'S MUMMY MAKEUP.)

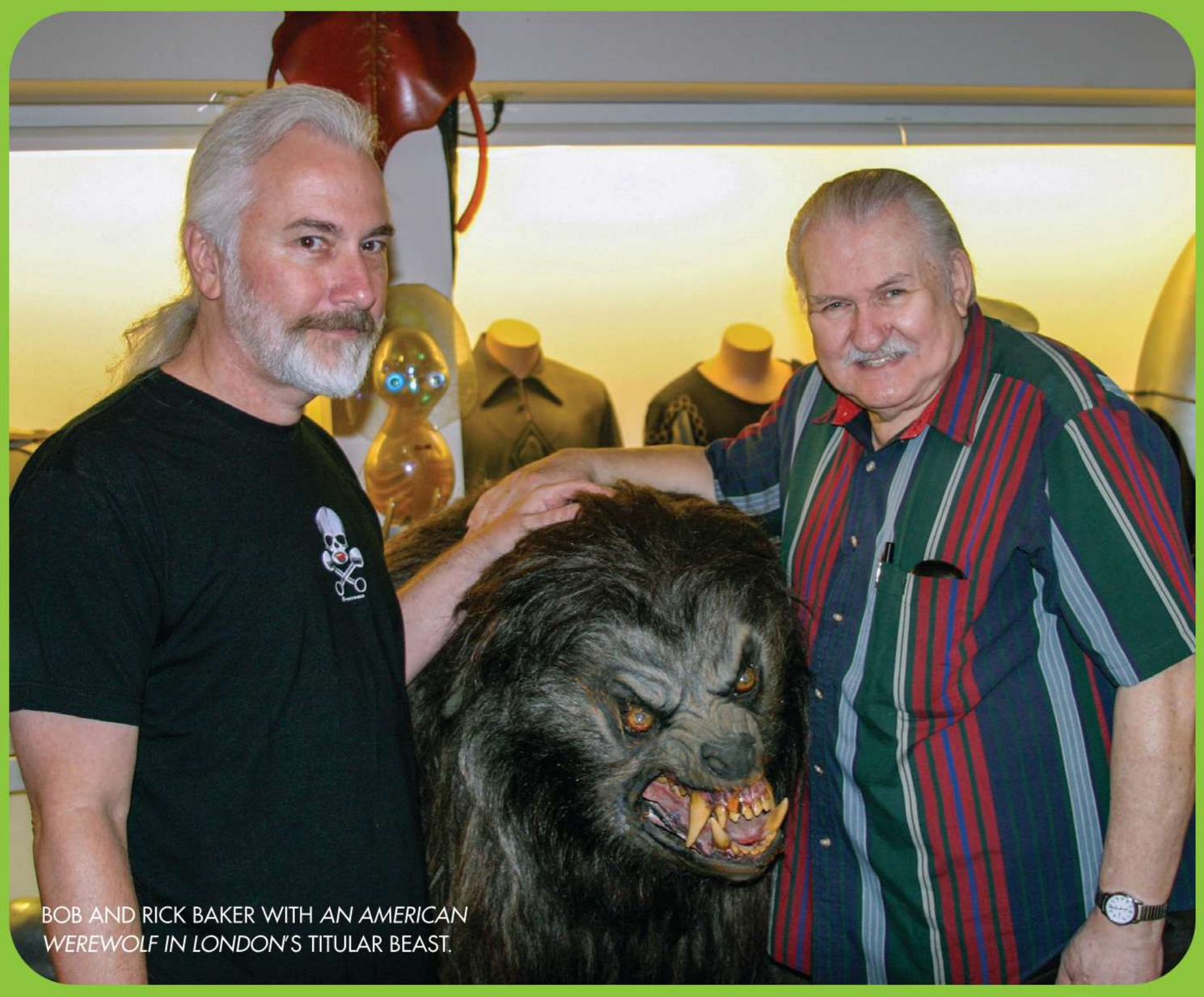
In Burbank, the foothills of the Verdugo Mountains form the stunning backdrop to the "Media Capital of the World." Their forbidding beauty contrasts starkly with the movie factories of Warner Bros. and Disney. The incongruity of the suburban sprawl in between might come as a bit of a buzzkill to us, but I'm sure the familiar monotony of middle America must be a comfort and a relief to the many who live and work there. That's their prerogative. Unfortunately for them, they happen to occupy a liminal space where dimensions tear open, and that's where the monsters leach through. Just as the beasts and fantasy worlds of Bob Burns' astonishing prop and memorabilia collection, known as "The Basement," seemed to breach his home and delight trick-or-treaters every year in extraordinary Halloween attractions, so did his enthusiasm and kindness spill out and nurture some of the most revolutionary genre filmmakers of the last fifty years.

On December 16th of this past year Bob left this world at the age of 90, joining his equally beloved and remarkable wife, Kathy, after nearly 65 years of marriage and more than four years apart. As many horror fans know, Bob Burns was many things: creature maker, die-hard collector, author, archivist. But in the words that follow, Bob's true legacy — as a kind, enthusiastic, and encouraging presence in the lives of generations of monster fans — is revealed.

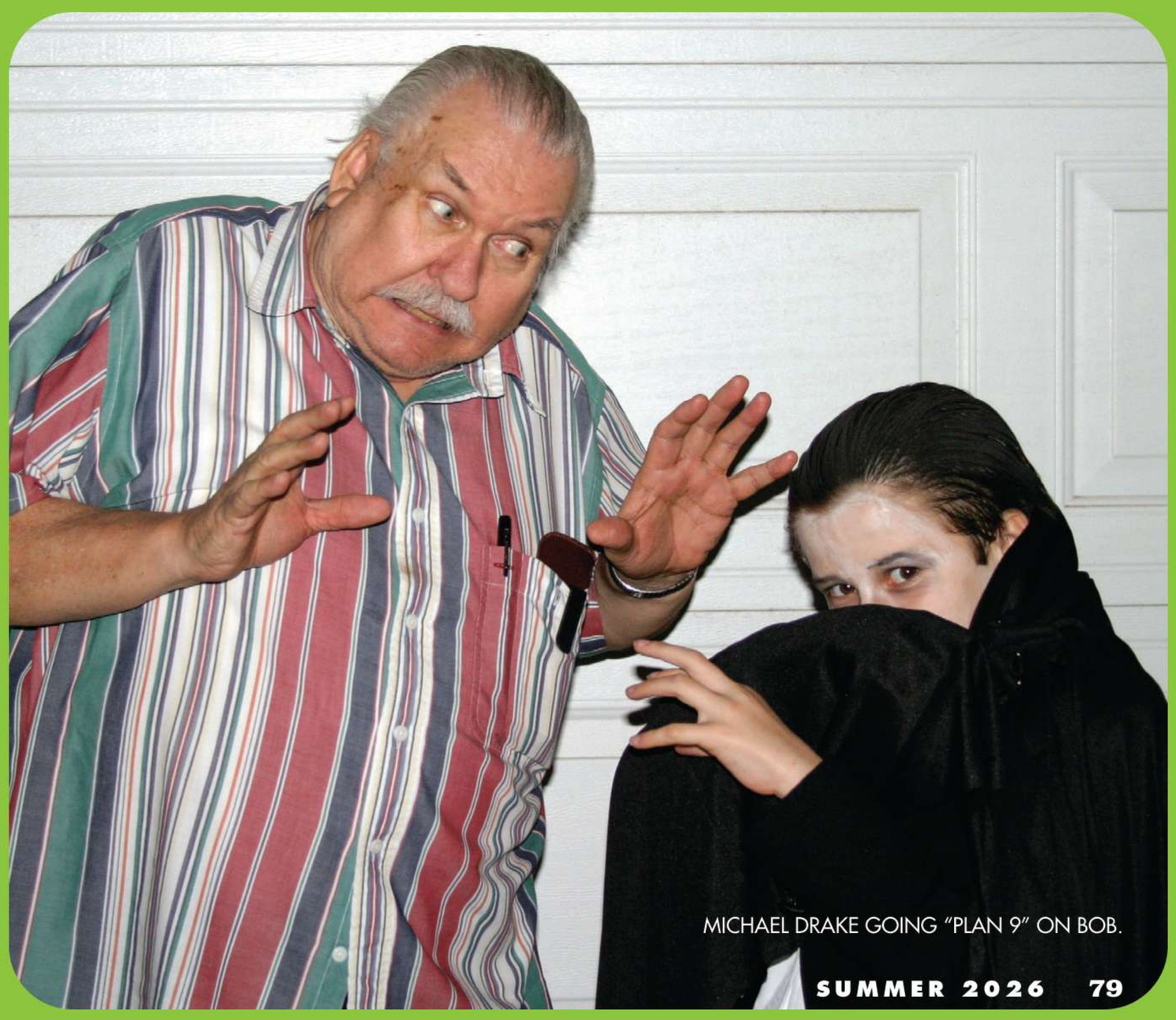
In 1963, 13-year-old future makeup effects master Rick Baker felt elated and terrified when he saw the personal phone number of Bob Burns on the monster mask makers Don Post Studios bulletin board, hung just below a production still of the "Mad Mummy" character from *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. Having passed through a whimsically gothic concealed passageway for a tour of the "lab," he and his father, Ralph, were about done when the "painfully shy" young man asked his father to call the Burns residence for him. "They were very kind and invited us over to their duplex… it was just a little two-bedroom place at the time, full of stuff. Really cool stuff." Thus began a 62-year friendship.

That Bob had left the card at the Studio to acquire makeup effects work, a career which had thus far escaped him, is an irony that no doubt occurred many times since, but it's one of many charmed alignments that formed his life. "I always used to tease him and say, 'Dude, you were the fucking Forrest Gump of the '50s,'" says dear friend Greg Nicotero. "Or better yet, I would just call him George from *The Time Machine*: somehow or other, he was able to zip around."

Prop-maker Ellis Burman's son was a classmate and childhood friend, and after repeat visits to their home Ellis gave Bob an auspicious item to start any prop collection: the iconic wolf cane head from Universal's *The Wolf Man*. Bob was invited to visit multiple active film sets before he turned 15, most notably the set for future friend George Pal's groundbreaking *Destination Moon* in '49. This need to blur the line between the fanatic and



BOB AND RICK BAKER WITH *AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON*'S TITULAR BEAST.



MICHAEL DRAKE GOING "PLAN 9" ON BOB.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER DRAKE

the craft itself is the stuff of fandom as we know it today. "Bob's the original Monster Kid… any time you say 'I'm a Monster Kid,' other Monster Kids, like, we get it, you know? We know what you're about," buzzes makeup effects wizard and friend Steve Wang. Baker reflects that Bob was "a role model in that you could be an adult but you could still be a kid and like monsters."

After the *Destination Moon* experience, teenage Bob began experimenting with special effects makeup and making his own movies. Around this time, he met Kathy. As Bob recalled, "I was showing 'em at a friend of mine's house and she happened to come over with a girlfriend that knew the guy who was showing the pictures." That encounter was enough to ignite a love affair that lasted longer than some people's lifespans. Their first date began with burgers at Bob's Big Boy followed by a screening of the 3D western *The Charge at Feather River*; already familiar with the film, during a shot where arrows fly out at the audience Bob produced one he had cut-off mid shaft and pressed it to his chest point-end-first, screaming pain and shock. Popcorn-flying, mass hysteria ensued, police were called in, and the newly minted couple slipped out as inconspicuously as possible, like something from your favorite rom-com.

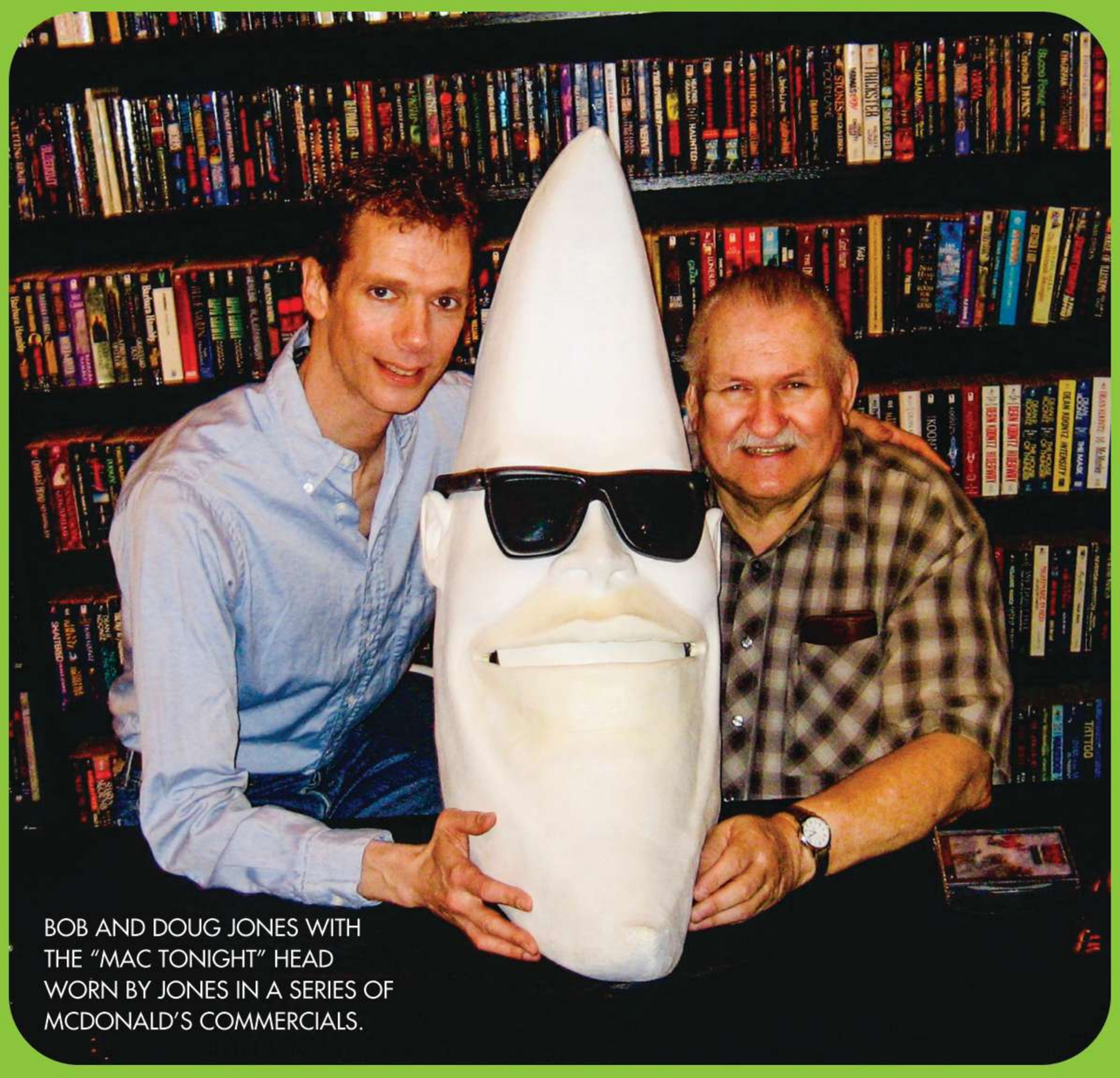
Fittingly, creating safer live spectacles would become one of their things as they grew together, and Bob's gift for establishing himself with industry elites and attracting new talent made those labors historic. "I love people with imagination," said Kathy. "I love spirit, and I love people taking risks and taking chances and trying something new, because that's the adventure of life. And he had the adventure of life in his soul, and I knew that was for me."

"I was lucky enough to meet him back in 1970," says longtime friend, prop maker, actor, and director, Bill Malone. "I realized, at that time, he was not only co-creator with Paul Blaisdell of the great *Fantastic Monsters of the Films* magazine but also worked with Paul making some of the iconic monsters of the 1950s." By the time Bob and Kathy met Paul and his creative/life partner, Jackie, Bob had already made some casual contacts in the makeup effects field, sitting

BOB VISITS ADI FX AND TOM WOODRUFF JR.'S GORILLA SUIT.

BOB AND HIS BELOVED WIFE KATHY.

BOB AND PAUL BLAISDELL WITH "BEULAH," THEIR VENUSIAN MONSTER FROM 1956'S *IT CONQUERED THE WORLD.*



BOB AND DOUG JONES WITH THE "MAC TONIGHT" HEAD WORN BY JONES IN A SERIES OF MCDONALD'S COMMERCIALS.

"I FOUND MYSELF FAR MORE CAPTIVATED BY SIMPLY SPENDING TIME WITH HIM AND TALKING MONSTERS THAN BY ANY ARTIFACT OR PROP. FOR ME, BOB WAS ALWAYS THE MAIN ATTRACTION."

- ROBERT SHORT -

BOB THE TIME TRAVELER.

PHOTOS (LEFT & RIGHT) COURTESY OF CGREG NICOTERO

BOB AND BLAISDELL WITH THEIR CREATIONS FROM 1957'S *INVASION OF THE SAUCER MEN.*

BOB AND FRIENDS (L-R): COMPOSER CHRISTOPHER DRAKE, BAKER, AND FILMMAKER PETER JACKSON.

TRACY THE GORILLA RELAXES.

BOB BRINGS THE 1933 KONG ARMATURE (AND HIS 76-YEAR-OLD SELF IN THE "TRACY THE GORILLA" SUIT) TO MICHAEL DRAKE'S CLASSROOM PRESENTATION ABOUT PRACTICAL FX.

ILM'S DENNIS MUREN, VFX MODEL MAKERS PAT MCCLUNG AND DENNY SKOTAK, AND COMPOSER CHRISTOPHER DRAKE VISIT BOB IN 2004.

in as a live subject for union reps to train their sons and nephews (and no doubt bristling when his application was rejected). But since the Blaisdells worked exclusively on independent productions, there was no obstacle to Bob's assisting them on some of AIP's most absurd ordeals.

He also befriended that diminutive giant of Gorilla Men, Charlie Gemora, a moment which had an impact on him and, indirectly, on the future of ape suit engineering. "I got my education from Bob on that," recalls Baker. "I didn't know Charlie Gemora by name... I knew the suit. And George Barrows and all the other guys that played Gorillas at the time, I definitely got that education from Bob."

Getting drafted in '58 became an unexpected vehicle for Bob's skill set when he was assigned to create hyper-realistic wound simulations for medic training videos. "They had a little plastic bulb and a tube to pump blood out of these wounds, that were all latex... and apparently it was a huge jump in believability," decorated visual effects man and cherished caregiver, Pat McClung, tells FANGORIA. Bob gave Rick Baker a tutorial on such wound techniques during that fateful first visit in '63. "I couldn't teach him anything. God, he already knew more than I did," said Bob.

"Their living room was full of boxes from floor to ceiling, with just little paths through it and a couch," says Baker of the collection's humble beginnings. Bob's friendships with individuals like the Blaisdells and father-figure Glenn Strange, who gave him several Frankenstein prosthetics and props from his time as Universal's Monster, were a major boon. Over time, it became as much a salvage and rescue operation as collecting for its own sake. "He'd always have some new props from old-time people that had given stuff to him from films, and everybody else was gonna toss 'em out," says multiple Oscar-winning VFX artist Dennis Muren.

Seeing these objects out of context, stripped of photographic enhancement and in all their material frailty, perhaps touching them – Bob knew this was a sacred rite, and made it accessible to anyone who asked. "You see a movie like *The Time Machine* [1960] and then you see the original prop and it's

something tangible, you can touch it. It's not just projected on a movie screen anymore… all of a sudden they become tangible and real," waxes Nicotero, warmly.

That prop, which had eluded Bob for years, was eventually discovered by a friend in a small-time pawn shop in '75. "The motor [for the disk] is a barbeque spit motor, so the guy's like, 'You can have all this other bullshit… but I want the motor,'" says another of Bob and Kathy's many children, film composer Chris Drake. Bob managed to get it home intact and enlisted friends like VFX artist Tom Scherman and concept artist Mike Minor to refurbish and restore it. As with many other items in the collection, the loving care put in by the Burns crew originally served a more ambitious end than mere display.

"I think Bob and Kathy had little gatherings — this was before the Halloween shows — And I don't know if Dave [Allen, VFX artist] saw them as much, or Jim [Danforth, VFX artist], as much as I did and Tom [Scherman] did, and Mike Minor, who was very big on these Halloween shows," recalls Muren. Halloween of '67 was a modest affair, but the scale and complexity of the shows grew dramatically as Muren, Scherman, and eventually Minor offered their assistance, always ending with a "Boo," to use Bob parlance.

Some of the shows involved props from the films which inspired them, such as *Return of The Time Machine* (attended by director George Pal himself), or, in the case of the '74 *Exorcist* themed show, the participation of key crewmember Rick Baker. The Burns's most outrageous windfall came when Bob requested permission from a Fox PR person to produce an *Alien* show in '79. In addition to a set of Xenomorph heads and an animatronic facehugger, which terrorized Walter Koenig ("Chekov," *Star Trek*) in the finished production, the studio delivered several truckloads of props including full-size ship models.

But after a 1982 riff on *Creature From the Black Lagoon*, with an uncanny suit replica by Bill Malone (who also created props for the '73 *Forbidden Planet* show), the ride didn't start up again for twenty years.

Nictotero recalls: "I was one of the people that had suggested we do one

BOB AND JACKSON WITH SOME HOLY RELICS.

BOB SHOWING OFF SOME KONG ART.

more show, which was the *Thing* show. And I said 'look: I have KNB behind me, we can build whatever we need, we can lend the talents of my team and all of the other artists to help.'" That 2002 production, which saw a return of Bob and Denny Skotek (whose work on the *Alien* show was a preview of their Oscar-winning contributions to the James Cameron sequel), also featured Pat McClung's forced-perspective witchcraft and prop design. It was also the first to feature a musical score, courtesy of recent LA transplant Chris Drake. He was so in awe that he stood frozen in place while Guillermo del Toro raved about the score to Frank Darabont during the VIP after-party until Drake's friend, Paul Prischman, finally had enough and thrust him bodily into del Toro's orbit. "We must work together. You know this fucking shit," said the filmmaker, mid bear-hug. And that was the beginning of Drake's professional career. Such was the magic of a Burns Halloween show.

As time wore on, so did the collection. Regarding the foam latex pieces, Nicotero explains: "What happens is that cell structure inside, those little air bubbles start to connect in bigger pockets of air, so ultimately those pieces are gonna fall apart." Thankfully, he assures Fango that restoration is possible. But the encyclopedic archive in Bob's brain is now physically lost, save what's been recorded by Fango Hall-of-Famer Tom Weaver and on DVD documentaries. It was that irrepressible zeal for life and movies, which his innate generosity and kindness compelled him to share with as many fellow seekers as he could. "Whenever I was at Bob's place, I found myself far more captivated by simply spending time with him and talking monsters than by any artifact or prop. For me, Bob was always the main attraction," says another Oscar-winner, makeup and visual effects artist Robert Short. In Steve Wang's words: "Every time I'd go see him, I'd always just sit there for hours listening to stories, and it was the most amazing thing."

Archivist and maker, mentor and student, mega-fan; Bob was truly a chimera, a monster fit to be honored in our hallowed halls of cursed man-beasts, botched scientific atrocities, and abominations of nature. Or as Bob put it, "I was just a lucky kid, I was at the right place at the right time."

JAKE GARBER AND DANIEL ROEBUCK IN CHARACTER FOR BOB'S *THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD* HALLOWEEN ATTRACTION.

BOB OVERSEEING CONSTRUCTION OF HIS HOME HAUNT.

BOB AND KATHY WITH *THE TIME MACHINE'S* ROD TAYLOR.

BOB AND FRIENDS.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CGREG NICOTERO

DREAD AND LOVING IT

BY YULISSA MORALES

VISIT SUNNY FLORIDA AND MEET THE CULT LEADER WITH A *GATOR FACE*.

It's your chica, Yulissa – VP of Distribution and Creative over here at DREAD, an independent horror label and nightmare factory. As usual, we've been keeping busy putting together projects that we hope will scare your socks and other clothing off. This time around I'm inviting you to one of the most terrifying places in the world.

FLORIDA.

Imagine if you will... a hot Florida day. Not The Most Magical Place on Earth™ with the screaming children version. Instead, I want you to put yourself in the middle of a hot swamp. Walk through the thick tall grass, swat away that giant mosquito that just landed on you and feel the sticky hot air in your lungs. It's sweaty, huh? You're hiding in a swamp because you've been chased there by a rabid mob of lunatics who want to sacrifice you to their Gator God. Yes, I said Gator God. You just heard a splash in that murky water, but don't move too quickly! We don't know what or who is in there. Could it be a gator? Could it be THE Florida Man, or could it be a cult leader with a taxidermied gator for a face?!

If you guessed the latter, you're right but it's probably too late to react... because your head has been cut off or chomped off... but let's rewind. And just like that, you've been introduced to the new sun-kissed face of horror. At Dread, we've humbly brought you the likes of Benny from *Die'ced*, Pale Face from *He Never Left*, The Jester from... *The Jester*, and many more! Now, we're excited to introduce you to the cult leader himself, *Gator Face*.

The way writer/director/sicko Padraig Reynolds (*Rites of Spring*, *Open 24 Hours*) tells it, "All I ever wanted was to make a real-deal alligator drive-in movie, the kind that plays best under the hum of a projector and the buzz of mosquitoes." In the film, a vacation takes a dark turn when a group of friends become prey to a group of folks you don't want to run into, and these poor kids don't stand a chance against the axe-waving cult leader they encounter instead of a chill beach hang.

And what better place for a cult than the Sunshine State? The team behind the film have committed to bringing the real Florida experience, including filming with real alligators for some of the film's more brutal kills. The result is a raw, grounded film, elevated by incredible practical makeup FX from Josh Russell and Sierra Spence.

Real gators. Real thrills. Real Florida! This September: you can't escape the heat... and you definitely can't escape *Gator Face*. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to try to convince someone to put that tagline on the poster. 💀

PHOTO COURTESY OF DREAD

JAMIE BLANKS 1971–2026:

A LIFE LIVED IN HORROR

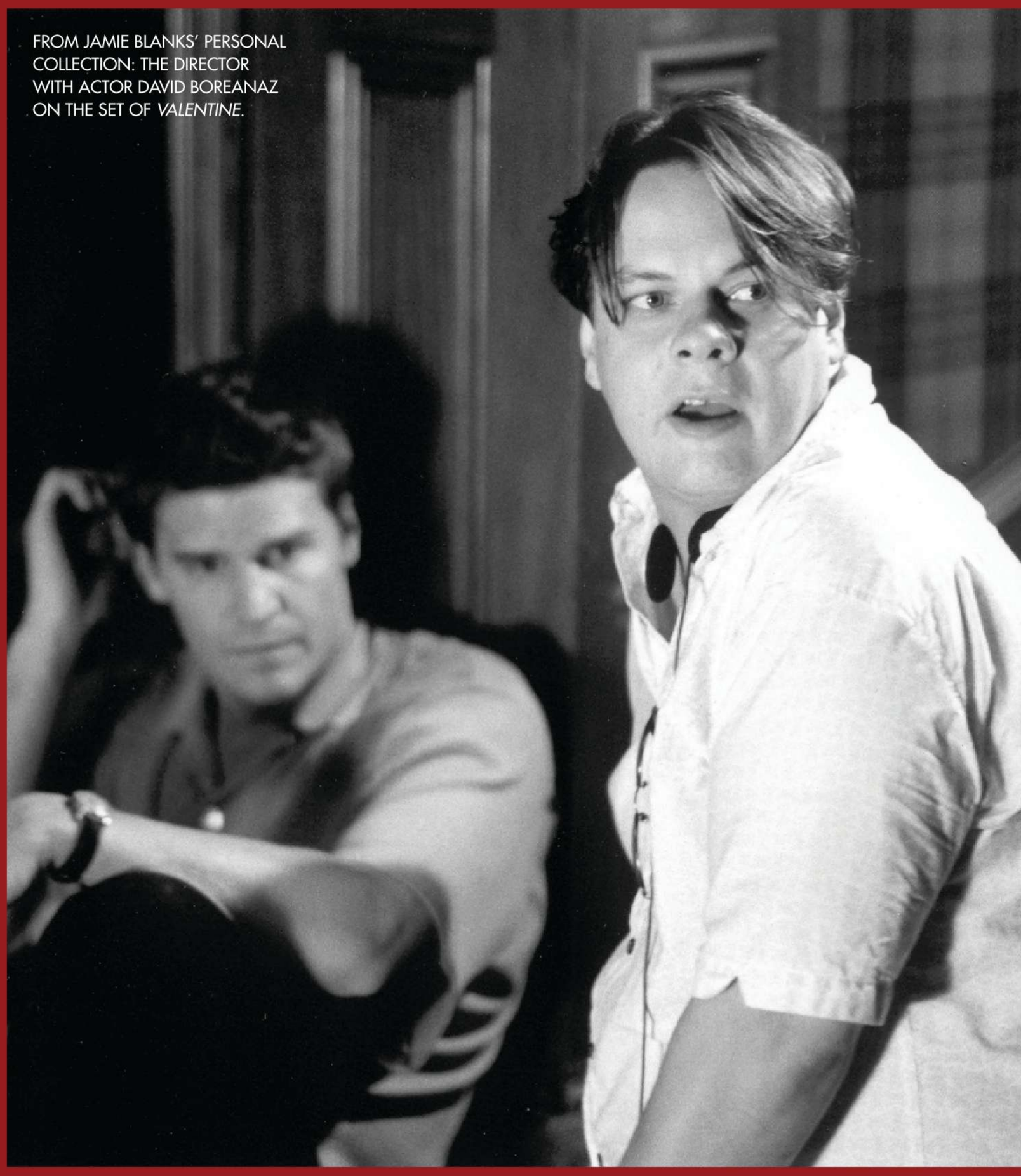
BY EMMA WESTWOOD

GIRL MURDERED IN COLD BLOOD
OVERNIGHT WHILE ROOMMATE SLEEPS
GIRL KILLED IN BIZARRE GAS STATION ACCIDENT
BABYSITTER PHONED BY KILLER WITHIN HOUSE.
HUNG WHILE UNSUSPECTING GIRLFRIEND WAITS IN CAR

Writing an obituary about a friend is tough, especially for the magazine that gave him his tuition in horror and stoked the talent that would see him develop his own voice as a genre filmmaker. Jamie Blanks wasn't just a successful horror filmmaker, though; he was our people — an OG Fangorian — who rose from fandom to represent us all on the big screen. He took an education in horror from books, movies and magazines while growing up in '70s and '80s suburban Melbourne, Australia, and blazed a trail into Hollywood. The circumstances behind his decade-defining debut, *Urban Legend*, have become one of those great inspirational underdog stories: Young filmmaker emerges from nowhere to create fake trailer for unproduced film, only to score his own $14m budget feature. It's a story that proves, even if you don't come from a position of wealth and privilege with industry connections — even if you live on the other side of the planet — you too can reach for the stars and take a shot at your dreams.

I won't labour over that story again. It's been told many times. Instead, for those who didn't know him, I hope to give you a sense of the incredible human being that Jamie Blanks was, and why we're all worse off with the Jamie-shaped void that's now been left in the world. For those who did know him, hopefully, this serves as a reflection of all the beautiful moments spent with Jamie and the special way in which he no doubt touched your heart. Because it was impossible to know Jamie and not absolutely adore him.

A unique talent. That's a platitude, but when put in context about Jamie Blanks, it takes on new meaning. He put so much passion and talent into his filmmaking, whether they were the films he directed — *Urban Legend* (1998), *Valentine* (2001), *Storm Warning* (2007), *Long Weekend* (2008) — or the countless others he worked on as an editor and composer, sometimes a combination of both. Because Jamie was a true multi-hyphenate, a one-man filmmaking machine who was as comfortable behind the camera, directing and shooting the action, as he was behind a keyboard, either composing the music and soundscapes or editing the vision. I'd argue he was an accomplished writer too, because he was so good at expressing himself and his ideas in words and interpreting the script from the page. But I know that's a title he would never attribute to himself, preferring to surround himself with "actual" writers instead and often bucking the usual industry practice by working with them closely on set. He would frequently marvel at how many writers were his friends.



FROM JAMIE BLANKS' PERSONAL COLLECTION: THE DIRECTOR WITH ACTOR DAVID BOREANAZ ON THE SET OF *VALENTINE*.

When watching Jamie's films, you notice the camera's athleticism. It never stops moving, exploring every aspect of the frame as a multi-dimensional space. He did so without grandstanding his own skills or distracting the audience from the story. The opening to *Urban Legend* is one of those perfect Jamie sequences where so much is going on with the camera, including crane shots (he didn't mind a few of those – and rain!) and yet the viewer is completely sucked into the performances and unfurling drama. But this level of cinematic mastery was something Jamie saw in others, not himself. That's another thing: he was remarkably egoless.

Case in point: after a screening of *Frankenstein* late last year, he expressed his excitement, in a star-struck kind of way, when Guillermo del Toro reposted his praise on X.

Me: "He no doubt recognises you as a great filmmaker too."

Jamie: "That's very kind of you to say, but I'm not in his league of course."

And then: "I love watching his movies and knowing I'm in the hands of a true master of his craft. His passion for cinema matched with his technical precision and great taste (plus raw talent) make him a truly special filmmaker. He also seems to be a lovely human being."

The irony is Jamie could have been describing himself as seen through the eyes of others.

Larrikin. That's an Australian word that describes the lovable rogue aspect

PHOTO (TOP LEFT) COURTESY OF TRISTAR PICTURES

JAMIE BEHIND THE SCENES OF *URBAN LEGEND* WITH REBECCA GAYHEART AND SHAWN MATHIESON.

of Jamie's personality. He was proud of his "Aussieness" and, after completing *Valentine* (2001), he left Los Angeles with his family to return to Melbourne, to the area where he grew up and where he first fell in love with horror at a screening of *The Fog* at the Mentone Life Saving Club.

The southern suburbs of Melbourne are Jamie Blanks' heartland. Southland Cinemas at Westfield in Moorabbin and Classic Cinemas in Elsternwick – it was here that he scrambled to see films before they disappeared off the big screen, and where he may have helped himself a little too generously to soda, choc-tops and popcorn from the candy bar – his Achilles' heel — not to mention the obligatory 'ciggie' before and after the movie. It was also in this area of Melbourne where he worked at a video store as a teenager, surreptitiously taking home the porn videos to cut footage of his brothers dancing into the "climactic" moments (apparently no customers were game to complain when returning these re-edited films), and where he started putting his learnings of horror into practice by directing his own "kill sequences" with family and friends across weekends and school holidays. Even at this fledgling stage, Jamie's

JAMIE DREW HIS ENERGY FROM FILMS AND WAS NEVER MORE ENTHUSIASTIC THAN AFTER SEEING A GOOD ONE, BUT HE WAS ALSO FUELED BY HIS RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE.

BLANKS ON THE SET OF *VALENTINE* WITH BOREANAZ AND MARLEY SHELTON.

skill was blatant, an intangible talent, one you either have or don't have, which made these largely comic gore sequences of stunts and practical special effects so bloody wonderful.

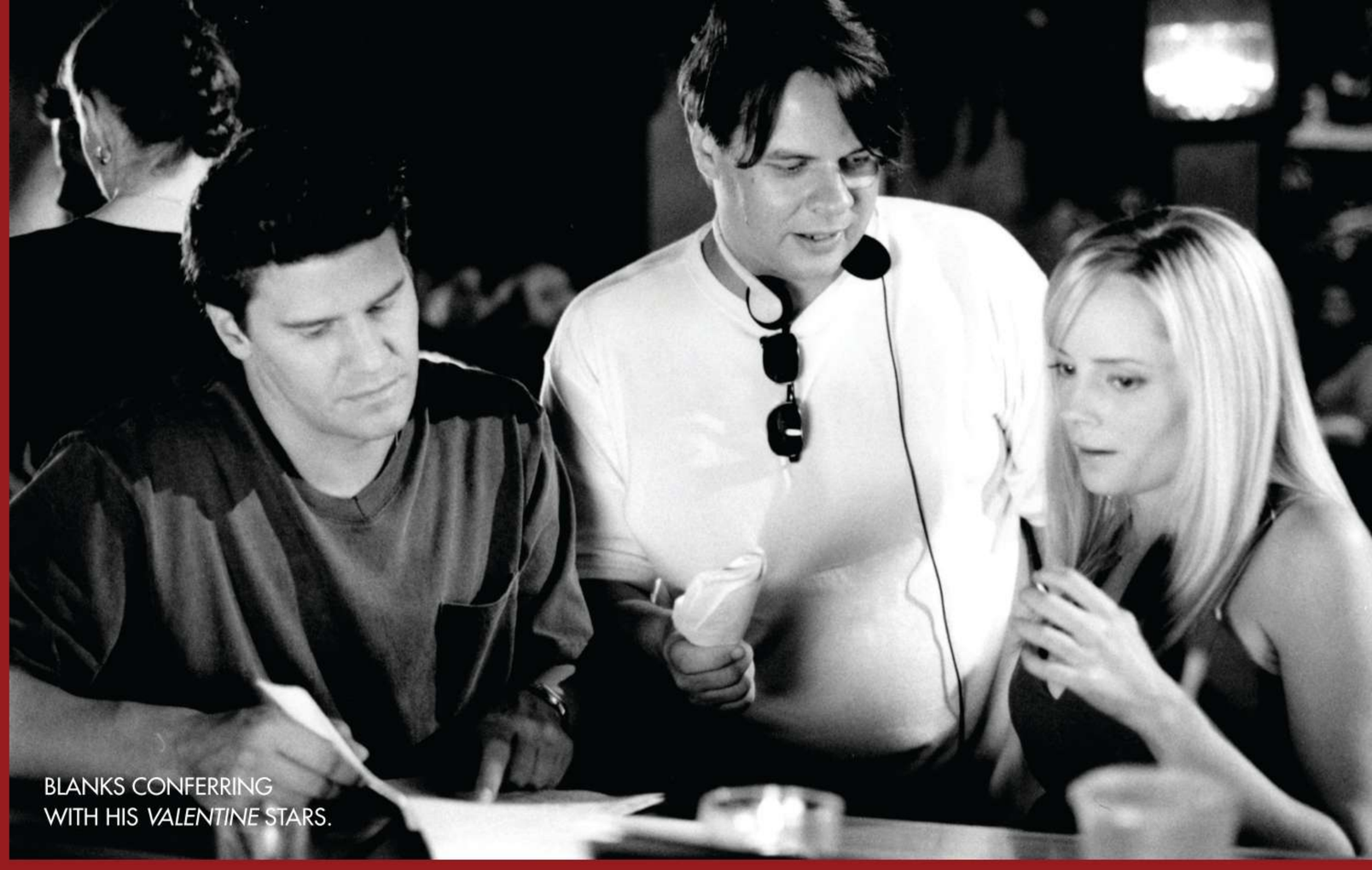
Sentimental soul. That's Jamie. His emotions ran deep and he wasn't afraid to express them. Whenever non-horror people question my own love of horror, I tell them, horror filmmakers are some of the kindest, gentlest people I know. And Jamie is the example I put forward. He wore his heart on his sleeve and was forever telling his friends that he loved them. It's common knowledge he was cut from a similar cloth as John Carpenter, being a director-composer, and he gratefully tipped his hat to Carpenter in a number of stylistic ways across his films (e.g. the repeated use of the Carpenter-style title credits font), but get Jamie talking about Carpenter's writer-producer Debra Hill, and it's apparent she was his most important horror mentor, both professionally and personally. In one of his last interviews a month before his death (find it on YouTube), he fights back tears when talking about his friendship with Hill. But that was Jamie. Never scared to show his feelings.

Filmmaking was Jamie's craft, but he managed to inextricably weave a love of music into that craft. Not just in scoring films with electronic music (he confessed to having 120 virtual synthesizers) but in hitting the right rhythms and beats as part of the editing process. Watching Jamie edit was quite the performance to behold. His hands would literally fly across the keyboard, as if playing a piano concerto. Drawing from an acute sense of rhythm and cinematic beat, he knew when to exit a shot, when to hold it, and how to combine footage to hit the right emotional chords. He would do this surrounded by his vast collection of physical media, mainly horror DVDs, which stretched from floor to ceiling around his studio, as well as memorabilia from his films. The cherub mask from *Valentine* being a noteworthy and eerie example, watching blankly (pardon the pun) over him.

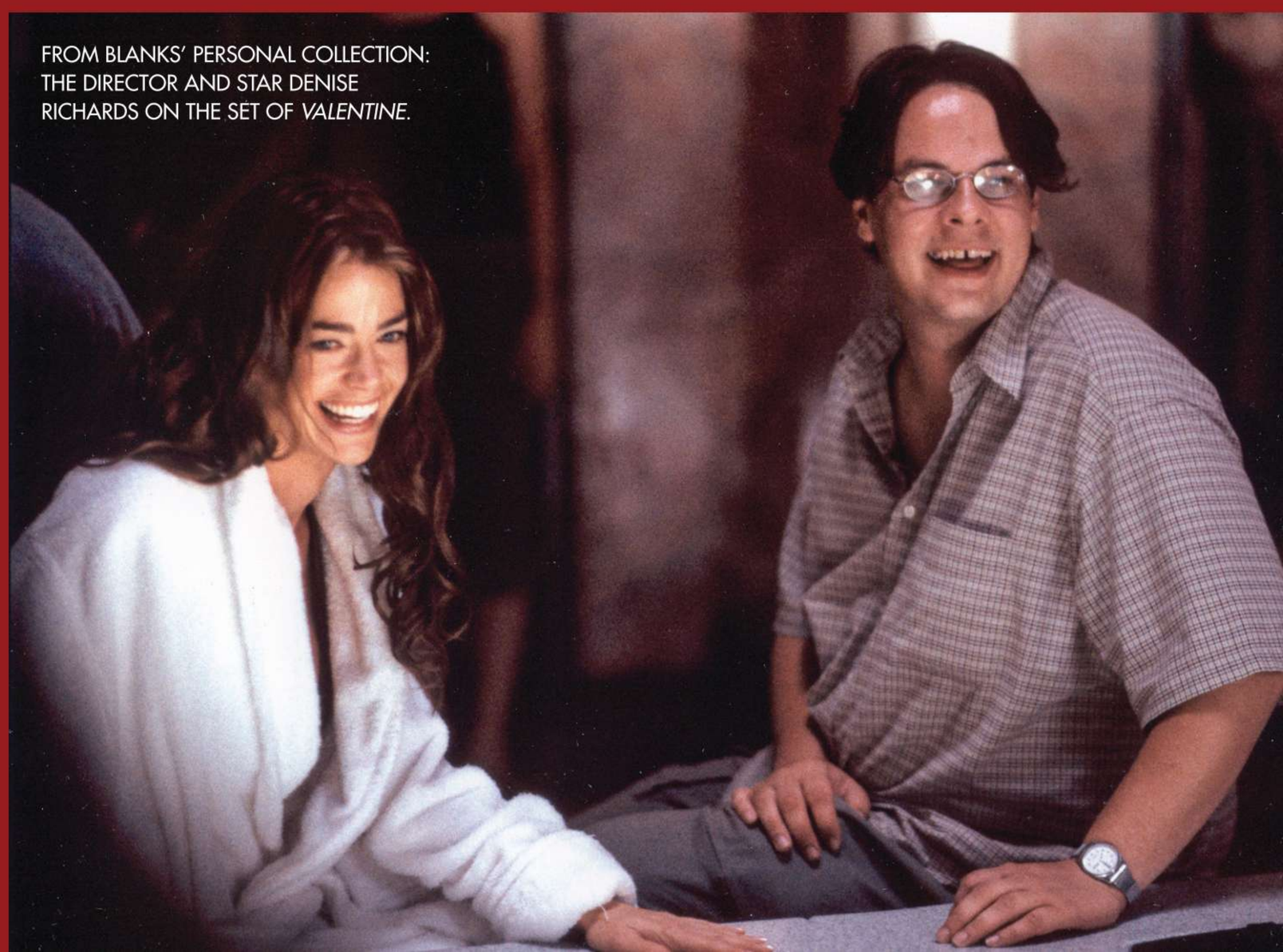
Jamie drew his energy from films and was never more enthusiastic than after seeing a good one, but he was also fueled by his relationships with people. For many years, he'd avoided social media until dipping his toe into Twitter. The experience sent him reeling because, suddenly, there was a flood of people reaching out to him, either to express their appreciation for his films, offer unexpected project opportunities, or just chat with a fellow horror film lover in forensic detail. And incredibly, he did his best to reply to everyone. Upon the announcement of Jamie's death, the social media outpouring put this into perspective. So many of these posts mentioned being surprised that someone of his filmmaking stature would bother to correspond with them. He didn't treat his audience as minions. He saw them as fellow fans of horror. He was one of us. He held onto a childlike excitement for movies, never becoming jaded. This made watching a film with Jamie an extra thrilling experience. My last cinema outing with him was Nia DaCosta's *28 Days Later: The Bone Temple*, where he whispered about 20 minutes into the film, "I am fucking loving this!"

Jamie wasn't finished with directing, and that's one of the great tragedies, that he was about to move onto another horror feature when he was unexpectedly taken from us. Consequently, there's this awful feeling of unfinished business, of someone taken way too young. For his friends and family, trying to comprehend a world without Jamie feels so senseless. When things got bad, hanging out with him was one of those simple pleasures that helped make the world a better place. Because you were never just a friend to Jamie, you were a "dear friend" or his "brother" or even one of his "favourite people in the world".

Rest in Peace, Jamie Blanks, dear friend. You will always be one of my favourite people in the world. 💀



BLANKS CONFERRING WITH HIS *VALENTINE* STARS.



FROM BLANKS' PERSONAL COLLECTION: THE DIRECTOR AND STAR DENISE RICHARDS ON THE SET OF *VALENTINE*.

Cullen Bunn's:

the World's Greatest Horror Comics!

THE MANY SHAPES OF THE WOLF

FOR A BEAST THAT HAS JUST ONE MAIN GIMMICK, NAMELY TURNING FROM A MAN INTO A MURDEROUS BEAST, THE WEREWOLF IS ONE OF THE MOST FLEXIBLE ICONS OF HORROR.

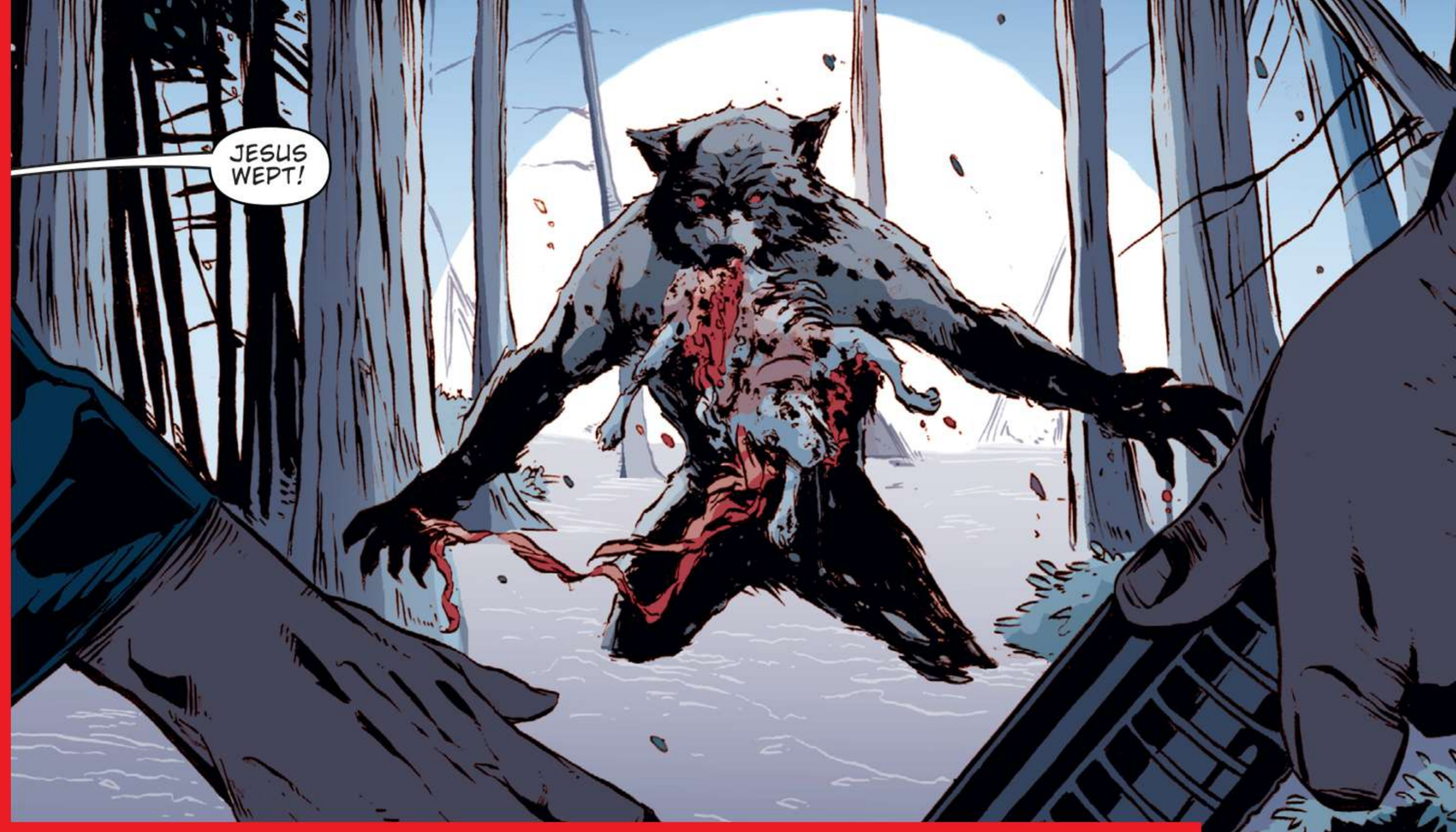
VAMPIRES HAVE SO MANY RULES. NO GOING OUT IN SUNLIGHT. NO ENTERING A HOME WITHOUT AN INVITE. NO STAKES THROUGH THE HEART (WHICH IS REALLY A RULE FOR *ALL* OF US, I GUESS). ZOMBIES HAVE RULES. SHAMBLE AFTER PREY. EAT FLESH. AVOID HEADSHOTS (AGAIN, SEEMS LIKE A GOOD RULE FOR THE LIVING TO FOLLOW, TOO). AND WITCHES? THEY ARE BOUND BY ANCIENT PACTS AND RITUALS APLENTY.

WEREWOLVES HAVE RULES, TOO. YOU KNOW THE DRILL. WATCH OUT FOR THE FULL MOON. HOWL IN THE NIGHT. NO WOLFSBANE. NO SILVER BULLETS. (ONCE MORE, THAT GOES FOR THE REST OF US, TOO.)

As a metaphor, though, the trusty old werewolf is a little harder to chain. They can be tragic figures or unstoppable engines of violence. They can be representations of puberty, addiction, rage, isolation, grief, repression, inherited trauma, the masks we wear in public versus what we become in private. They can symbolize the fear that something violent inside us is just waiting for the right moment to take over. They can be about loss of control, or the terrible realization that maybe we never *had* control to begin with.

Or they can just be big, snarling personality problems with teeth and a taste for meat.

But you can't just drop a werewolf into *any* story and expect it to work. I once knew a writer who had a zombie comic in the works around the time *The Walking Dead* blew up. (Want to talk about fear? The fear of someone else beating you to the publishing punch on a project is *palpable*.) Trying to save the book, he swapped the zombies out for werewolves. Same plot. *Exact same* plot. Different monsters. He was surprised when this *find-and-replace* tactic didn't yield a horror masterpiece.



(Now, though, I wonder about a zombie werewolf. How do you kill it? A silver bullet to the brain? What about a zombie vampire werewolf? Would you need a silver stake through the skull?)

Werewolves are versatile, yes, but they're unique, too.

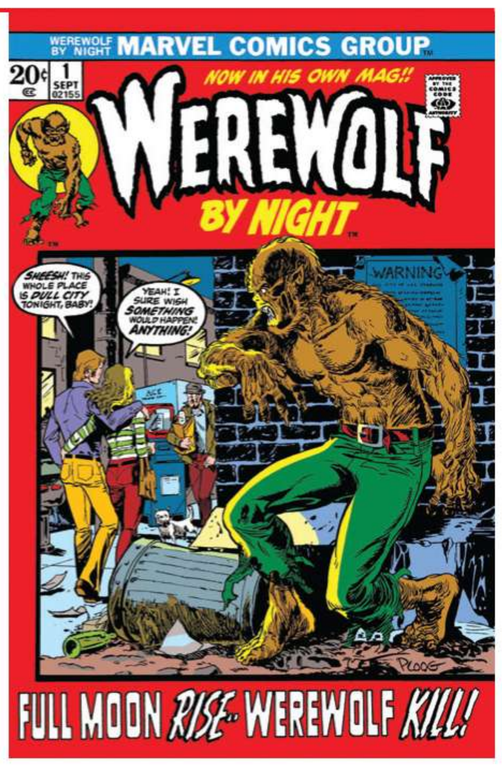
Which makes it a perfect monster for comics.

The first comic book werewolf appeared in the '30s in the pages of *More Fun Comics*. In that story, the lycanthrope tangled with Doctor Occult. In the years since, there have been many comic book werewolf stories. So, if you're looking to shift from your favorite beastly movie to a new favorite hair-raising comic, here are a few suggestions.

THE WOLF MAN

Maybe your werewolf tastes run toward tragic curses. The original curse that can't be outrun. A dark fate that's coming for you no matter what you do.

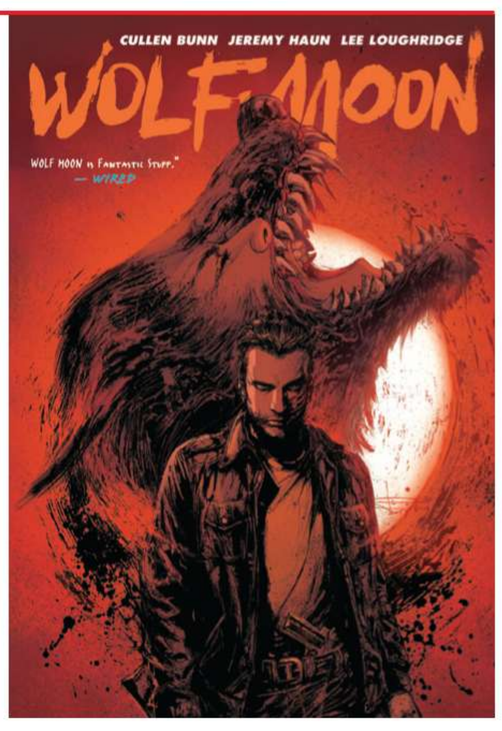
***Werewolf by Night* (Created by Gerry Conway, Roy Thomas, and Mike Ploog, Various Creators follow):** Is Jack Russell the most famous comic book lycanthrope? Probably so. He is definitely the purest expression of "Even a man who is pure in heart and says his prayers by night may become a wolf when the wolfsbane blooms and the autumn moon is bright" in comics. *Werewolf by Night* presents a horror hero who travels the world, getting into numerous misadventures, transforming by the light of the moon, battling cultists and demons and even Dracula. The original run of this series gave birth to Moon Knight. Numerous other interpretations of the character run from kitschy to much, much darker.



AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

A more nightmarish take on curse-borne werewolfism. Body horror and gallows humor collide in a story you just *know* isn't going to end well.

***Wolf Moon* (Some Writer and Jeremy Haun):** I'm cheating here. Breaking my own rules. But it's too good not to mention. In *Wolf Moon*, the condition of lycanthropy is, itself, predatory. The curse leaps from host to host each month, creating a trail of bloodshed and mayhem, destroying lives wherever it manifests. Hunting the monster who is never the same person twice is no easy task. But a victim of the curse is setting out to do just that.



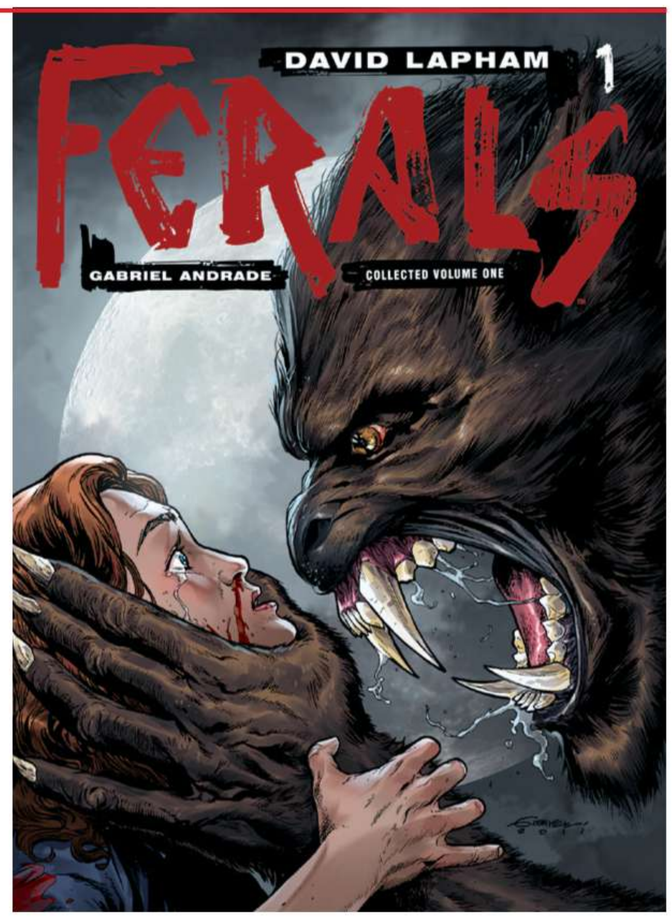
IMAGES COURTESY OF CULLEN BUNN

THE HOWLING

Werewolves as a secret pack-based society. Sexual repression and violence. The tug-of-war between feral instinct and what we call civilization.

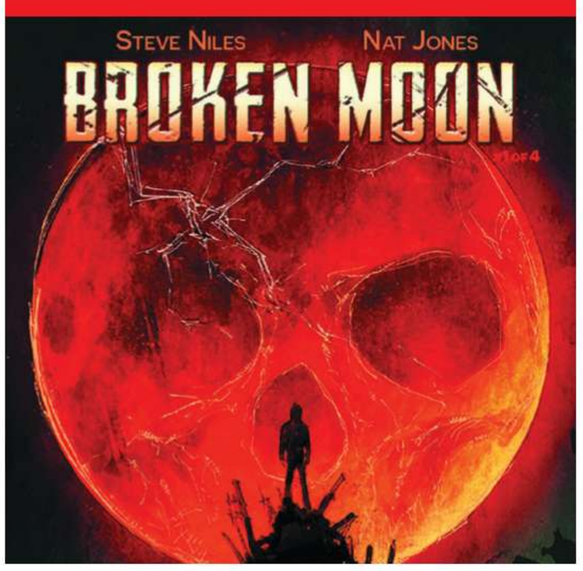
***Ferals* (David Lapham and Gabriel Andrade):** In this gory, action-packed crime-meets-werewolf book, an ancient hidden society of monsters lives among us. A small-town cop is drawn into this secret world of murder, violence, domination, and hunger.

***Moonshine* (Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso):** This Prohibition-era crime tale follows gangsters pushing into the Appalachian Mountains. There, they hope to broker a deal of 'shine, but they discover the locals are werewolves. As you can imagine, negotiations get… complicated.



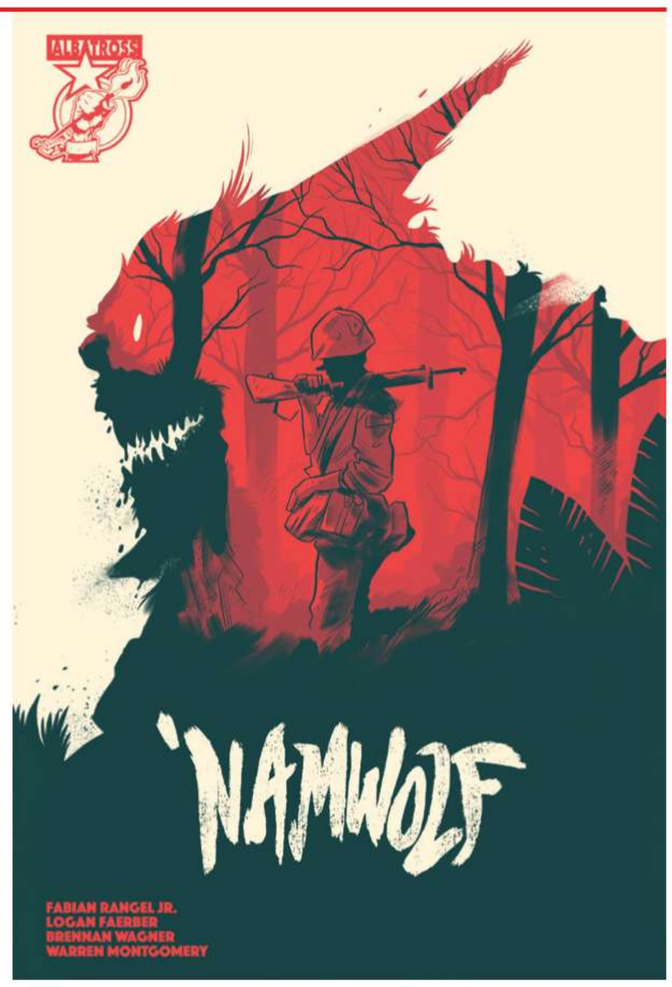
DOG SOLDIERS

A pack of brothers-in-arms versus a pack of kill-happy werewolves. This siege horror/ action epic showcases loyalty, betrayal, and sacrifice in the name of survival.



***Namwolf* (Fabian Rangel Jr. and Logan Faerber):** We know war is Hell, and this comic embraces that idea. A young draftee is dropped into the jungles of Vietnam. That's frightening enough. But he's also discovered that he's a werewolf. What follows is a high-octane, grindhouse escalation of bullets, blood, and bodies.

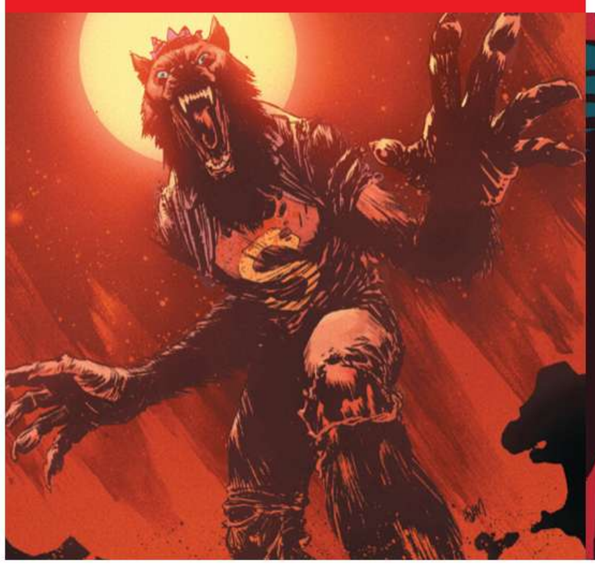
***Broken Moon* (Steve Niles and Damien Worm):** Here's an exception to the rule. Remember when I mentioned werewolves being unable to fill the shoes of zombies in an apocalyptic tale? Well, this comic sort of does that. And does it well. This is a post-apocalyptic story of a collapsed human society and a rising werewolf civilization.



SILVER BULLET

This monster-in-plain-sight tale of mankind's bestial and civilized duality in a small town showcases determination and the will to stand up against gaslighting and disbelief.

***Jughead: The Hunger* (Frank Tieri and Pat Kennedy):** Jughead Jones (yes, *that* Jughead Jones) is the secret werewolf in this horrific rebrand of a classic *Archie* tale. As grisly murders mount, the community is torn apart by a monster hiding in plain sight. All the familiar Archie characters are here, but in the face of paranoia, denial, and angst, they become suspects… or victims.



WEREWOLVES WITHIN

This comedy/horror operates as a whodunnit (or at least a *whoisit*) full of paranoia and suspicion.

How to be a Werewolf **(Shawn Lenore):** This long-running webcomic focuses more on relationships and responsibilities than violence and bloodshed. It follows Malaya, a werewolf trying to manage her condition while navigating social dynamics. Who knows? Who suspects? Who can you trust? It's thoughtful, often funny, and deeply character driven.

GINGER SNAPS

This is the story of puberty and sexual awakening and a frightening transformation… from girl to woman.

Monica Bleau: a Werewolf Story **(Montaño):** What personal costs are part of lycanthropy? That's where this book shines. The story follows a young woman trying to understand what she's becoming while holding onto who she was. The horror here is in the loss of control, the shifting identity, and Monica's realization that her body might not belong entirely to her anymore.

WEREWOLVES SLIP THE LEASH. WEREWOLVES CHANGE SHAPE. BY THE GLOW OF THE FULL MOON, THEY MOVE BETWEEN TALES OF HORROR, TRAGEDY, SELF-DISCOVERY, ACTION, AND DARK COMEDY.

CURSE. CHOICE. INFECTION. INHERITANCE. INSTINCT.

MONSTER…

OR MAYBE MIRROR.

WHATEVER YOUR POISON (OR YOUR PERSONAL WOLFSBANE), THERE ARE PLENTY OF WEREWOLVES… AND WEREWOLF STORIES… TO CHOOSE FROM. 💀

Cullen Bunn has been writing horror comics for a long time. His books include *The Sixth Gun*, *Harrow County*, *Regression*, and *Deadpool Kills the Marvel Universe* among many others. He's even written a few vampire comics, such as *The Midnite Show*, *Blood Feud*, and *Brothers Dracul*. His most recent horror comics include *Deluge* and *Ripcord* from Ignition Press. His prose novel *Bones of Our Stars, Blood of Our World* is out from Gallery Books. He hosts a YouTube show called *The Cullenoscopy* where he discusses all facets of the horror genre.

THEN--SOMETHING CLEARED IN HER FACE. HER EYES SOFTENED, THE FEAR WASHING OUT OF THEM.
SHE HELD OUT HER HAND--
--AND SHE TOUCHED ME.
JACK…IT IS YOU, ISN'T IT?
I…CAN SENSE IT, SOMEHOW..

ANTHONY EVERITT'S

the VIDEO EYE

of the SON of DR. CYCLOPS

All aboard! Dr. Cyclops choo-choo-chooses these three train-set horrors for us.

DR. TERROR'S HOUSE OF HORROR (1965)

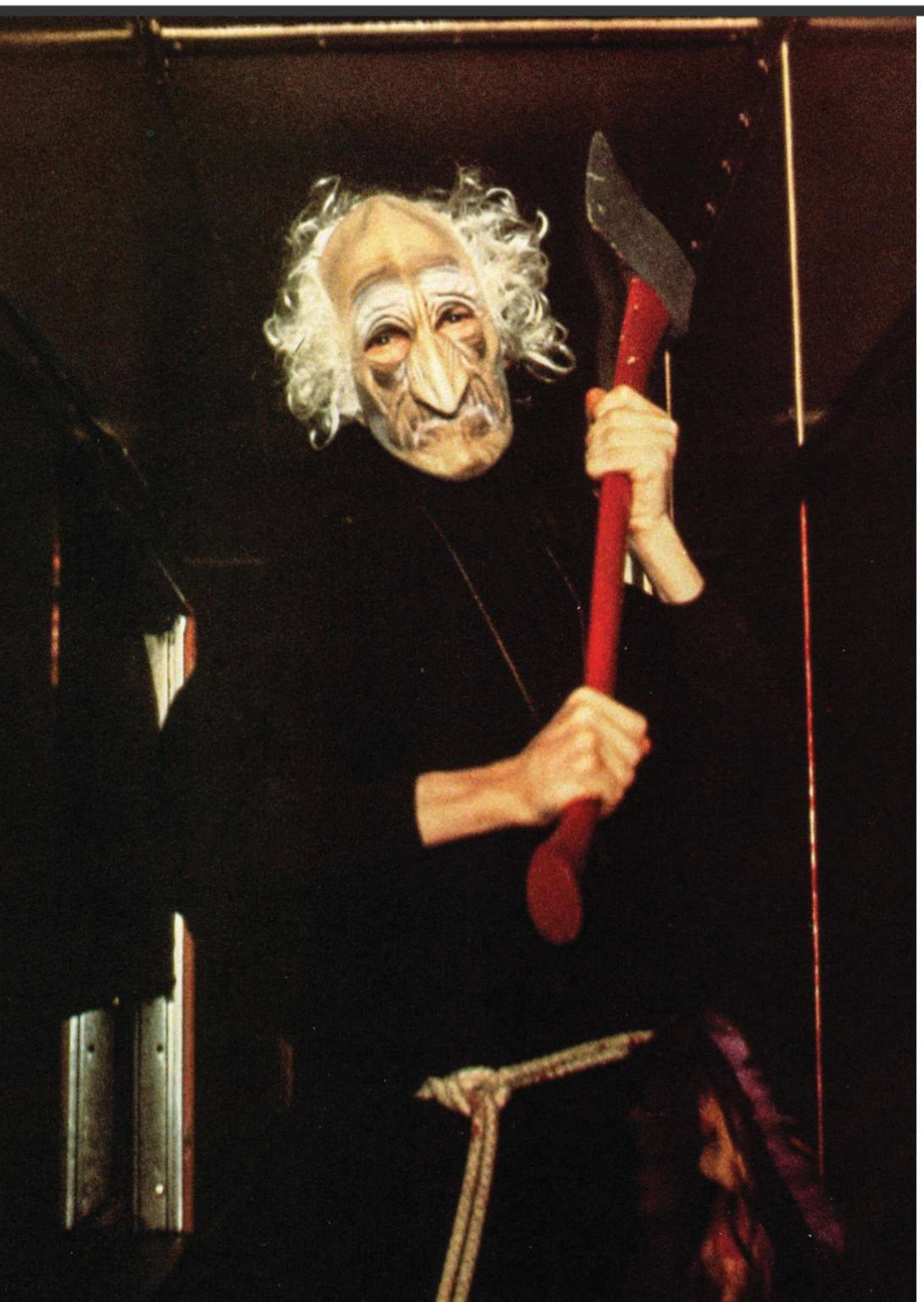
No one with sense will deny that a train car filled with strangers is more plausible than a house, but *Dr. Terror's Train Car of Horror* lacked the necessary gravitas, particularly for Amicus' debut horror film.

One tends to be more impressed by a self-identified "Doctor of Metaphysics" in a dark, romantic parlor room than public transportation, which is good, because the latter scenario is statistically more likely, and I imagine that the repeated emotional strain would be unbearable otherwise. That's to say nothing of the irritating people you might get stuck with, like the blustery, pretentious art critic doomed by his arrogance, or the white jazz musician doomed by his appetite for cultural appropriation, the guy with the ancestral gothic house that's haunted by a vengeful werewolf. It all starts to feel a bit like a "best of" sampling of movie tropes, minus the dream-like quality which makes the surreal wraparound in *Dead of Night* feel appropriate. Almost like the compartment you're trapped in with these people is the space inside the head of a screenwriter and not really a nightmare. But sometimes you just need a tried-and-true plot device to pass the hours, something familiar that makes you feel like you're "in on it." And why not? If these nudniks want to take the ramblings of any kooky old coot they meet on the train seriously, then you might as well have fun, enjoy the novelty of the occasional unexpected plot twist, savor the confusion when characters come and go without any proper introduction or indication of who they are or where they came from.

HORROR EXPRESS (1972)

Sometimes the experience of public transit can cause wild, unpredictable mood swings and even personality changes. Christopher Lee's characters seem to start from a zestfully salty baseline, but it's fair, regardless, to cut him some slack as he negotiates the process of reading a newspaper while surrounded by a bunch of ordinary people and their incessant droning, or, in this case, as his face quivers with British levels of horror and disgust as Peter Cushing successfully bribes a Siberian hack for the privilege of buying a ticket. As for personality change, I'm hard pressed for a tidier explanation as to how an anthropology professor might confuse a frozen ape carcass for a fossil. If he'd kept it on ice he might have avoided a lot of trouble in the first place. Then again, if indifference and accepting minor inconveniences leaves you vulnerable to mysterious hypno-botomies, maybe a little prickliness isn't so bad in the end; he does seem to take an especially dim view of hypnosis and hypnotists. It stands out, even on a train so inexplicably lousy with scientists.

Then Telly Savalas shows up as some kind of Cossack Police Captain, and what started off as a Hammer sci-fi horror-cum-disaster movie takes a sharp left into Spaghetti territory. You know then that you must be watching something filmed in Spain, but thanks to the consistency of the soundtrack and the stylistic flair all-around, it doesn't even feel like a tone shift. In fact, there's a bitter trace of irony and gruff cynicism throughout which feels very reminiscent of Leone, a favorable comparison by any stretch.

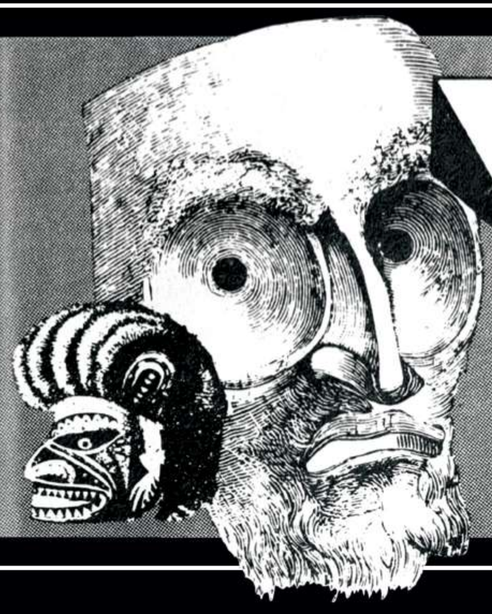


TERROR TRAIN (1980)

Terror Train sounds more urgent than *Horror Express*, but any such urgency is lost after sitting through the basic program of revolting sex-prank/psychotic breakdown and the obligatory farce of sexually flippant adolescents and their sleazy clown humor. A wise man once said: "Sex kills!" Hard to feel terror for a bunch of fraternity people willingly walking into a "Death Curse," don't you think? I guess if you're a frustrated, pimply 14-year-old boy in the early '80s, this is a delight. Well, I came out just as fuckin' horny and ready to devastate some nerds as I was before. But I'll stay clear of party trains in the future if radio communication really is such a no-no.

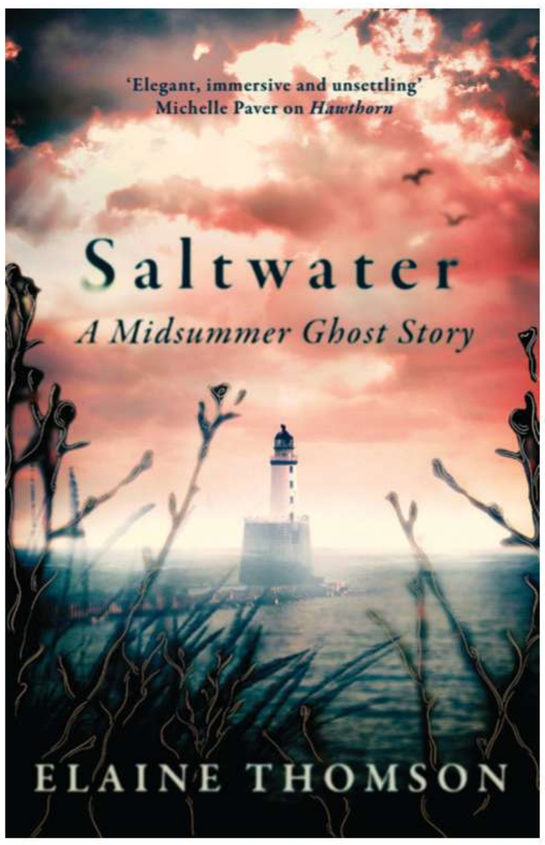
Either the filmmakers thought that adding a magician would break up the monotony of rejected *Animal House* jokes, or they wanted to build a movie around David Copperfield performances on a train and the slasher medium seemed as good as any. The fact that the assistant looks like him in drag, or maybe his real sister, adds a layer of unintended confusion and tension to the plot in a way which the writers might not approve of. On a side note, I feel bad for Ben Johnson, who's probably daydreaming about making a pulpy shambles of a sheriff's posse and some unfortunate civilians with a Gatling gun somewhere while pretending to be nice and accommodating to these society brats.

I will say that the identity reveal at the end is well done, and the prolonged standoff with Jamie Lee Curtis is unexpectedly gritty and disturbing at times for slasher fare.



NIGHTMARE LIBRARY

BY AHLISSA EICHHORN



SALTWATER: A MIDSUMMER GHOST STORY

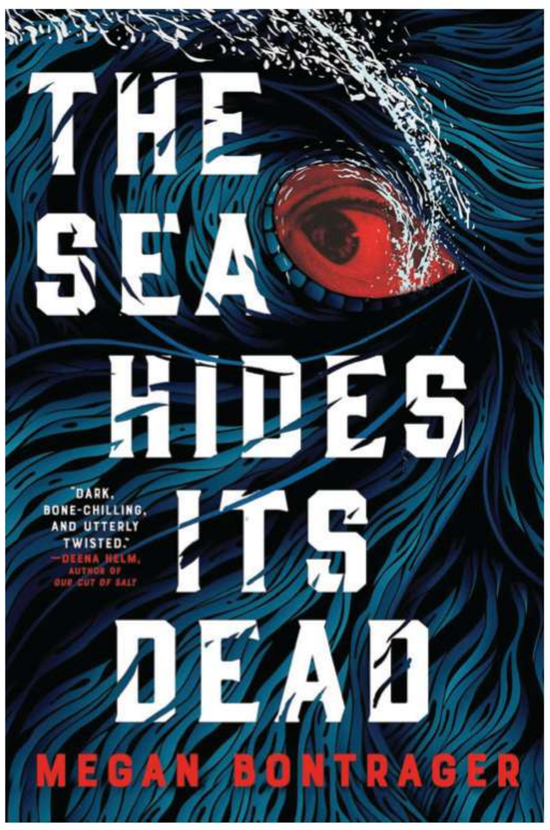
DUE OUT:
6/18/2026

AUTHOR:
Elaine Thomson

PUBLISHER:
Sphere

Scottish lighthouse engineer Thomas Torrance lives a solitary life dedicated to his work. His latest project takes him to the Isle of Stroma, a rural community surrounded by some of the most dangerous waters in the United Kingdom. As midsummer approaches, his crew grows more uneasy: Accidents and setbacks slow the construction, and their blame is thrown towards the superstitious locals. But Tom relies on logic and sense above all else, clinging to them even as misty visions stalk his every move and fill his mind.

Saltwater is drenched in archetypal Gothic ambience, its 1896 maritime setting heady with bright descriptors and similes that lull you into a pastoral daze. Accompanying it are topics of grief, lust, and buckets of nautical mythology. Readers who don't gravitate towards period horror can be assured that this is as foreboding and engaging as any modern tale. The fright keeps coming and cuts right to the quick, quaintness be damned. Its wraiths and watery nightmares torture the characters in all sorts of creative, insidious ways, and the protagonist harbors so much interesting conflict that it nearly diminishes the need for other points of view. Unearthly and transportive, *Saltwater* is a sensory playland akin to the world of *The Woman in Black*, with the staunch marine aesthetic of *The Fog*.



THE SEA HIDES ITS DEAD

DUE OUT:
7/14/2026

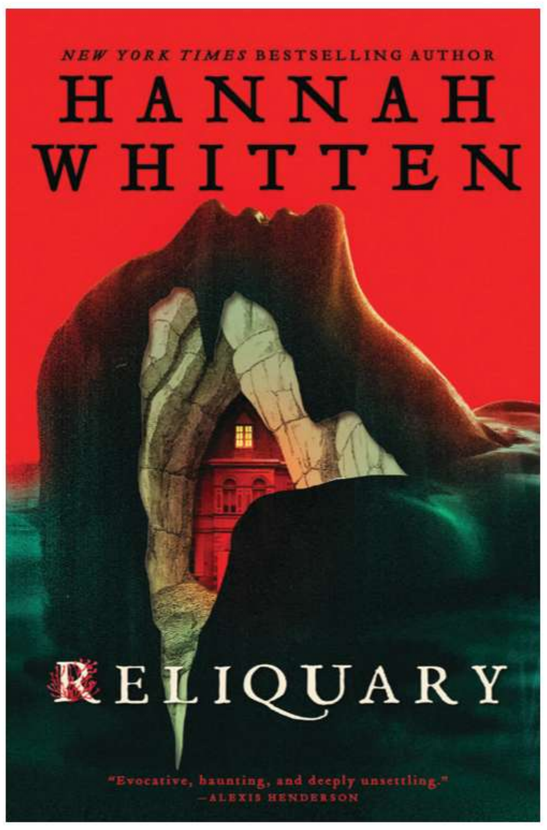
AUTHOR:
Megan Bontrager

PUBLISHER:
Run For It

Caroline is desperate for purpose. But as a directionless grad student, she knows she would do anything for her professor and lover, Edward Beck. This includes joining his anthropological expedition team to enter a sea cave where the fabled Cult of the Leviathan is said to have worshipped. Soon after venturing in, the group of academics become trapped, and have no choice but to journey further into its shadowy depths, where either death or redemption awaits.

Fans of *As Above, So Below* and *The Descent* will love getting lost in the novel's rugged, liminal space. It changes from cavernous to claustrophobic on a dime, but the meticulous writing really anchors the reader, especially during complex action scenes and emotional face-offs. Its cosmic and survival horror trademarks are strong. Bloodthirsty, shapeshifting entities and manic hallucinations run the course, but the personal drama is just as vital to the payoff. The focus isn't on the cult itself, but on the characters' growing fear of it. Each of them has a sinful past to atone for, and their terrifying trials make up the bulk of the rising action. *The Sea Hides Its Dead* is packed to the gills with hold-your-breath moments, and serves up an intense maelstrom that's hard to shake off.

THE SEA CALLS TO TWO TYPES OF PEOPLE: THOSE WHO ANSWER IT AND THOSE WHO STAY THE HELL AWAY FROM IT. OFT ROMANTICIZED, THIS TREACHEROUS VAST HARDLY NEEDS HELP TO INSPIRE UNEASE. MONSTERS, MYTHS, UNFATHOMABLE DEPTHS, YOU NAME IT – THE OCEANIC HORRORS GO ON AND ON. IF YOUR SUMMER HAPPENS TO BE SPENT ON THE COUCH WITH GOOD AIR CONDITIONING OR ON A BEACHY LOCALE, LET THESE SEASIDE SCARES BE THE PERFECT SEASONAL MOOD SETTERS FOR YOUR GENRE FIX.



RELIQUARY

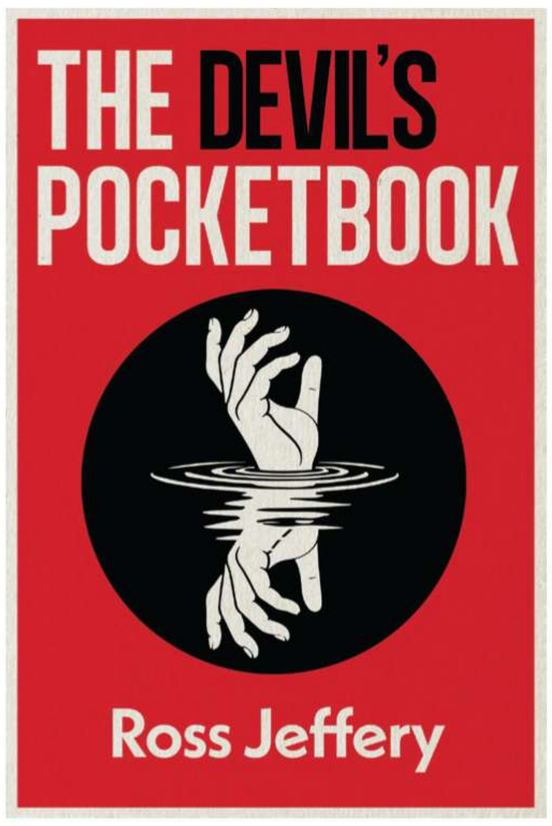
DUE OUT:
8/11/2026

AUTHOR:
Hannah F. Whitten

PUBLISHER:
Orbit Books

Claire thought her world ended the day her fiancé Elias died. She's prepared to retreat into a lonely existence until his estranged family invites her to their private island for his wake. Sure, they're eccentric and disgustingly wealthy, but their insistence on her presence makes her believe a chance of having a family is around the corner. She can put aside her aversion to water for one weekend, even if these people seem to live and breathe the ocean.

If you liked the visceral classism commentary of *Ready or Not*, you're going to be into this survival story too. Replacing the heavy weaponry is thalassophobia tension and splashes of slippery body horror. The pacing trots along, never getting ahead of itself or holding the reader's hand. It keeps you in the dark long enough for a satisfying reveal but takes every opportunity to layer on the mystery and creepiness. Themes of guilt and obligation remain steady on the waves of exposition, while a tone of surly humor in the narration complements the scarier moments. There's also a hint of a romantic plotline, but it's evaded in favor of something more tragic. *Reliquary* is a doomed meet-cute plucked from the weird, colossal darkness of the sea, at once amusing, bleak, and swimming in aquatic chills.



THE DEVIL'S POCKETBOOK

DUE OUT:
8/18/2026

AUTHOR:
Ross Jeffrey

PUBLISHER:
CLASH Books

Erik and Lara were supposed to live happily ever after with their newborn daughter, but fate cast them a devastating hand. Now in mourning, they retreat to a coastal town in Cornwall to heal their fracturing relationship. The waters are as unwelcoming as the locals upon their arrival, but the couple is quickly distracted by their shocking discovery: a little girl encased in a sac, spat out by the ocean itself. They take the strange child in and are instantly bewitched by her. It's almost as if she's the daughter they never had…

The Devil's Pocketbook isn't a story you can casually dip in and out of. Its funereal mood engulfs you and lingers after reading. The briny seaside environment is crucial to this, enhancing the author's tone with every spray of freezing water. The acts of violence are keenly vicious and add a necessary edge to an otherwise cerebral situation, and giving an age-old sea legend a boatload more ferocity makes the themes feel much fresher. The author also throws in fun horror references that don't feel out of place at all. Bearing the bereft soul of *Don't Look Now*, this bold novel unfolds as a mean folk horror with major creature feature thrills.

Contributors' Crypt

Follow our talented roster of contributors on social media, instead of all those FEET pics you're faving!

Sean Abley ..... @gay_of_the_dead

Meredith Borders ..... @mereborders

Cullen Bunn ..... @cullenbunn

Barbara Crampton .. @barbaracrampton

Ahlissa Eichhorn .. @hauntedbydeadlines

Anthony Everitt ..@deathmetaltypewriter

Isaac Feldberg ..... @ijfeldberg

sHANE tEA fRENCH . @shane_tea_french

Yulissa Morales ..... @_yulissamora

Richard Newby ..... @rnewb

Amber T ..... @hornbloodfire

Josh Turi ..... @joshturimakeup

Things to Come

What will this fall bring you in your trick-or-treat bag? Who can say. You might get a look at CLAYFACE's misshapen mug, you might hear a big fish story about WHALEFALL, you might even take a trip to CRYSTAL LAKE or do the monster mash with Larry Fessenden's TRAUMA OR, MONSTERS ALL. Be here in three months, and remember: no costume, no candy!

CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

Happy birthday to two of Fango's shiniest bits of guts! We love you, Meredith and Angel!

Good luck on your first set visit, Hasith!

FREDDY RULEs and
(f)Art the Clown DROOLz!!!!

Our little (not so little) Daisy, mum and dad love you more than you will ever know. howl out know. howl out loud.

RIP Stabby Stabby (2021-2026) We finally escaped Moleman's Movie Hole! Love always, Eric — stabbypod.com

Hula in the kitchen? In this economy??

Happy birthday to Arvinda and Armen <3

Congrats on your first Fango cover, Todd!

"I wish I could lay your arms down/And let you rest at last/Wish I could slay your demons/But now that time has passed." We love you, ASH. You'll always be our stalwart, standing fast.

How many Amityville movies do you think we are getting this year?

Time to go LOG some STARs.

Is a Tauntaun a reptile or a mammal?

It's time to plant your pumpkin seeds so that they are ready for October!

Screams from the Basement is horrors home for your FAVORITE Double Feature discussions, from genre favorites like The Bride of Frankenstein and Frankenhooker to nostalgic classics like Halloweentown and Hocus Pocus. We also interview the industry's finest that help make our SCREAMS become NIGHTMARES, including Charles Band, Barbara Crampton, and Doug Jones.

Amityville Backrooms

At the end of April, Alyssa and I said goodbye to sweet boy Pepe the pug. He was my best buddy, and frequently appeared on Fango's social media — getting dressed up in costumes, modeling our merch, and even asking for your votes in the Chainsaw Awards. Everyone at FANGORIA was very supportive during that time, and Fango readers reached out to offer condolences. At Texas Frightmare Weekend, people stopped by Fango's booth to tell us they were sorry for our loss. It was very sweet of people to do that, and we are both very thankful. The community that the Fango team has built over the years is truly special, and I appreciate y'all. My office, where I design and lay out the magazine, is a little quieter without his weird little pug noises, but everyone's kindness really helped. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,
Jason Kauzlarich

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